RUNNING HEAD: ROCK CANDY: REPRESENTING A MESSAGE FROM THE PAST

Personalized rock:

A nostalgic fairground revival confection

Charles Spence[1] & Jozef Youssef[2]

1. Crossmodal Research Laboratory, Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK (charles.spence@psy.ox.ac.uk)
2. Kitchen Theory, 9a Alston Works, London, UK (jozef@kitchen-theory.com)

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CORRESPONDENCE TO: Prof. Charles Spence, Department of Experimental Psychology, Anna Watts Building, University of Oxford, Oxford, OX2 6GG, UK.

ABSTRACT

Rock candy is a popular confectionary item and has long been associated with the seaside funfair here in the UK. One of the distinctive features of so-called fairground rock is that it requires careful (time-consuming and skilled) construction in order to deliver the eye appeal associated with having text running through the centre of each and every stick. This difficult-to-produce design feature is all about enhancing the eye-appeal – one might, in fact, think of it as 'eye candy' – since it presumably has no direct effect on the taste/flavour of the confection so produced. Our idea is to present small bite-sized pieces of seaside rock to give to the diners at the end of the fairground-inspired meal served by Kitchen Theory. This will enable the chef and his team to give the guest a personalized token that will hopefully trigger a positive sense of nostalgia, one that will last long after the meal is over. Given the technical challenges and time constraints involved in producing personalised lettered rock using traditional methods, a number of alternative solutions (involving different methods of production, or different forms of personalizing candy) are suggested. That said, an ideal solution has yet to be determined, given the various constraints (e.g., limited time and a focus on the quality/authenticity of the taste experience).

KEYWORDS: PERSONALIZATION; SEASIDE ROCK; FAIRGROUND SWEETS; 3D FOOD PRINTING CONVERSATION LOZENGES.

Introduction

Personalisation has become something of a buzzword in the world of high-end (or luxury) hospitality, in particular with hotel and travel services. In recent years, many in the world of fine dining and particularly the most highly recognised modernist chefs have been finding new and innovative ways to make their diner's experience more intimate and personalised (see Anon., 2018; Spence, 2017). This is a part of the larger modern culinary trend around encouraging emotional engagement in the dining experience by evoking nostalgic feelings and positive memories. This approach to contemporary dining was nicely captured in the following quote from chef Heston Blumenthal when describing the philosophy behind the re-launch of the Fat Duck restaurant as; *"the first personalised, humanised, restaurant experience"* (quoted in Wallop, 2016).

However, one might wonder whether there is a difference between the feelings that may be generated simply by name personalisation (or customization), and the rather more involved personalization that is achieved by tailoring an experience to a diner's personal memory (as is promised by a handful of high-end restaurants; see Spence, 2017, Chapter 10)? Indeed, name personalization is already becoming standard practice for many high-end dining experiences, as in the knowing greeting on arrival, even if it should be the diners' first time at the restaurant. In the present case, though, the plan is for part of that personalization to take place via the rock that the diners will hopefully leave the Kitchen Theory dining experience with.

Personalized rock

For years, chefs have signed personalised messages on menus for their guests to keep as a lasting memento of their dining experience. But there are alternatives; the idea here is to personalize a historic confectionary treat for diners to take home with them, namely seaside rock with the diner's name running through the centre, or else some other brief message from the chef. And rather than a single treat (i.e., one long stick of rock), as was traditional at the seaside, the idea is to provide the guests with a small bag or box of bite-sized sweets all carrying the same message, so that their experience will extend well beyond their physical departure from the restaurant. Ideally, in fact, it will be shared with those who may not have been present

at the event itself.[1] That said, the challenge in this case (as mentioned below) is that the traditional method for achieving this end result is relatively time-consuming and difficult to produce in small quantities, and hence alternatives are sought.

A short history of rock

Rock has been a popular confectionary item, one that was especially popular at the seaside and/or funfair. The name itself derives from 'rock candy,' another name for sugar candy, or crystallised sugar, in late medieval period. In fact, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term first appears in print in 1652 (i.e., the end of the Medieval period). And while the term itself is not used much in the UK any more, one sometimes still finds mention of rock candy in North America. One of the earliest mentions of lettered rock in print appears in Mayhew's (1864), *London labour and the London poor* where the following quote appears: *"The man who has the best trade in London streets, is one who, about two years ago, introduced – after much study, I was told – short sentences into his 'sticks'. He boasts of his secret. When snapped asunder, in any part, the stick presents a sort of coloured inscription. The four I saw were 'Do you love me?' The next was of less touching character: 'Do you love sprats?' The others were, 'Lord Mayor's Day' and 'Sir Robert Peel'. This man's profits were twice those of my respectable informant's.'* Meanwhile, in Henry Weatherley's (1864, pp. 60-61), *Treatise on the art of boiling sugar,* one finds mention of 'Love Rock' so-named, at least according to Richardson (2003), because the word LOVE was what was generally encased in the sweet.

However, lettered rock really first came to public prominence, and acquired its association with Blackpool, a seaside resort in the North of England, in the closing years of the 19th century (see May, 2016; Race, 1990). According to Anon. (2015): *"Rock is believed to of been first sold at UK fairgrounds in the 19th century, hence it was originally known as 'Fair Rock'. Although it was similar to what we know as 'Seaside Rock' these days, it did not have the lettering or vibrant colours we know and love."* Indeed, according to Mason and Brown (2006, p. 235): *"The making of rock goes hand in hand with the growth of mass transport and holidays for the working population of industrial England. Blackpool, one of the first beneficiaries of the*

[1] And, should there be need for a sonic accompaniment to this part of the meal, then one might do worse that George Formby's (1953) "With my little stick of Blackpool rock", a track whose lyrics were once censored by the BBC (https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1572793/The-songs-censored-by-the-BBC.html).

process, is a natural candidate for particular association with the sweetmeat."[2] That said, rock was not itself actually made in Blackpool until the 20th century (Mason & Brown, 2006, p. 235). The association of lettered rock with Blackpool can actually be traced back to Ben Bullock, an ex-miner from Burnley (Anon, 2015). According to Race (1990, p. 11), Bullock owned a confectionary factory in Yorkshire and first began producing lettered rock in 1887.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

The above account certainly fits with a reader's letter appearing in *The Guardian* newspaper (here in the UK) in response to the question: *"How are words inserted into sticks of (eg Blackpool) rock? Where and when did this promotional ploy originate?"* (see Nooks and Crannies, n.d.). There, an A J. E. Slade, from New Malden, Surry writes: *"A DISTANT ancestor of mine was a partner in the sweet-making firm of Slade & Bullock. The 'Bullock' of the partnership was Ben Bullock, a Burnley miner who moved to Dewsbury in 1868 and began selling boiled sweets in Dewsbury and Heckmondwike markets. In 1876 he formed his own company and began increasing his range of products. One of these new products was the first example of lettered rock."* Slade continues: *"I continue the story by quoting from an article in the "Dewsbury Reporter, published in 1976. 'Ben turned out his first batch of lettered rock with the words 'Whoa Emma' inside them as a tribute to a popular song of the day. The Whoa Emma rock sold like magic at West Riding markets but bigger things were yet to come. 'The discovery of a paper which could cover the sticks of rock and yet be removed easily coincided with Ben's decision to take a fortnight's holiday at the home of Mr John Pilling, of Talbot Street Post Office, Blackpool. Shortly afterwards a few hundredweight of Blackpool lettered rock was sent to the resort and the novelty so caught the public fancy that the Dewsbury firm was inundated with orders from seaside resorts all over Britain. [Ben Bullock's] fame spread abroad and demands for lettered rock arrived from all over the world, with exports going to such places as Malta, the Sudan, India and Australia.'"*[3]

Traditionally, lettered seaside rock, as it is now known, had a peppermint-flavoured white centre with letters running throughout its length, and a pink outer covering (see Race, 1990). Oftentimes, the name of the town where the rock was sold would run through the rock, thus

[2] As noted by Harold McGee (1984/2004), the English had a particularly strong sugar habit in the 19th century (and arguably still today). Tim Richardson (2003) in his Sweets: A history of temptation makes much the same claim.

[3] See Partridge (2003, p. 534) for reference to the song Whoa Emma.

explaining the close association with Blackpool (Race, 1990) (see **Figure 1**). The hope at Kitchen Theory is that a positively-valenced wave of nostalgia will be triggered in those diners who are (reintroduced) to this traditional fairground/seaside confection. There is certainly an opportunity here for the chef and his ream to personalize a brief message for each and every diner with this one-off customization (i.e., personalization) being delivered through modernist cooking techniques/technology. In a sense, one can think of it as offering the chef the opportunity to deliver 'a message from the past'.

Making lettered rock: Traditional methods

The writing that one finds running through sticks of rock is remarkably modern in terms of its design aesthetic. Out of its historic context, such an unusual form of food presentation would perhaps seem much more at home in the world of contemporary modernist cuisine (see Myhrvold & Young, 2011). After all, the aim in this case is to deliver a particular visual impact (i.e., the effortfully-achieved lettering in the rock) in the absence of any functional benefit in terms of flavour delivery or product preservation. That said, making lettered rock has historically been a time-consuming and skilled process (see Mason & Brown, 2006; Race, 1990). According to tradition, boiling sugar would first be allowed to cool until it became manageable by hand. At this point, the now dough-like sugar would have been kneaded vigorously either by hand (for smaller quantities) or more commonly by specialist machinery (for larger batches). "Pulling" the sugar at this point helps to introduce some air into the mix, thus changing the texture, and the appearance from transparent to white. Nowadays, though, white pigment is sometimes added, as well. The other bright colours, meanwhile, would always have been achieved by the addition of dye.

According to one commentator, the letters would be formed by arranging cut strips of sugar like building blocks. Race (1990), though suggests that each of the letters would have been formed separately by pulling, stretching and combining the different coloured sugars into large long cylinders (see Race, for photographic documentation of the process). Note that the sugar must be kept slightly warm all the while in order to maintain pliability. More recently, the letters are sometimes made from moldings (c. 6 inches in height), that are then surrounded in white sugar candy (Richardson, 2003). The middle of these approaches is undoubtedly reminiscent of the much older tradition of pulling striped sugar into lengths, as seen in candy canes (see Mason, 2015). According to Mason and Brown (2006, p. 235): *"A recipe given in*

the 1830s for striping pulled sugar comes from a Nottingham confectioner, S. W. Stavely, who gave instructions for making Paradise Twist to be streaked red and white." Although, as Mason (2015, p. 578) notes: *"rock with complex patterns in the middle seems to have developed in an English context, Italian illustrations from the nineteenth century show vendors pulling sugar as a novelty sold on the beach in Naples."* (see also Mason, n.d., 2004, 2006).

Finally, the text that runs through the rock is constructed by sticking the individual letters together in the correct order and then rolling them in to one large mass. At this point the cone/cylinder shaped mass of rock is quite large (this can vary but a rough approximation is about 30-40cm diameter), it is then pulled and rolled until the desired diameter is achieved. The long bars of lettered rock are finally cut-to-size and cooled while being rolled gently (see Anon., 2005, 2009; see also https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5EVEDI5VAgQ).

Alternative means of delivering personalized messages in candy

Given the laborious and time-consuming nature of making fairground rock in the traditional manner, 3D food printing might seem like an appealing alternative means by which to create personalized candies having the visual appearance of pieces of seaside rock.[4] See Fernandez (2015), Ledford (2015), Lewis (2012), Moskvitch (2011), and Zolfagharifard (2014), for some of the recent interest in the 3D-printing of food. Ideally, the diner's preferred name will be confirmed prior to the dining event. However, even if the latter is only established at the start of the meal, there should still be sufficient time for the food printer to deliver enough individualized pieces of rock, given the 3-4 hr time window from when the guests arrive to when they leave the multisensory dining experience. Furthermore, the relatively small number of diners (normally a maximum of 10) means that this ought technically to be achievable in the time available. The diners can then leave with a printed personalized menu detailing the dishes that they have been served during the meal, together with a small bag containing bite-sized pieces of personalized rock.

Unfortunately, however, it is not possible currently to reproduce the extremely hard texture of lettered rock using current 3D food printing technologies. As such, a little culinary tromp l'oeil

[4] Note here that lettered rock can also be custom-made with a customised message (or couple of words), though this requires a minimum order of 300 pieces (e.g., see http://www.personalised-rock-sweets.com/). However, the company in this case makes full-size sticks, whereas the aim is to give the guests a bag of bite-sized pieces. Fortunately, there are a number of other contemporary producers now selling bite-sized pieces, the latter format helping to showcase the interior design much more prominently.

may be required to deliver something having a softer texture that nevertheless still looks distinctively like fairground rock (cf. Aduriz, Vergara, Lasa, Oliva, & Perisé, 2012). The aim being to have something with coloured letters running through the white centre and a brightly-coloured pink exterior. In order to be authentic, it should probably also have the peppermint flavour traditionally associated with this kind of confectionary.[5]

One potential problem that one soon runs into here though is that 3D printed candy tastes pretty bad, and nor does it have a great texture either. Just take the following feedback from informal taste tests reported online to get a sense of what anyone interested in producing 3D-printed candy is up against: *“"A Lifesaver that — somehow — went stale."; "Sugar, maybe with some paper plates mixed in."; "It's been like five minutes and I can still taste it. And not really in a good way."; "The initial texture was weird. I liked the sour one, but I think I would destroy my mouth eating tons."*” (from Galezka, 2014). Or: *“‘‘I’ve never thought of candy as dry . . .”; “Gets stuck in your teeth.”; “It tastes like an after-dinner mint mixed with a sugar cube. Or a sugar cube made of crushed-up dinner mints.”; “I would be very excited if this tasted more like a chip.”; “It’s like . . . what is it like? It’s not like anything.”’* (from Smith, 2015).

The Victorian-era conversation lozenge

Should the challenge of producing personalized lettered rock with a satisfactorily-authentic mouthfeel/texture/taste prove too challenging (as indeed it seems it might), one might alternatively consider delivering a variant on the Victorian-era Conversation Lozenge instead. These sweets, with a message stamped on the front (as seen to this day in Life Savers in The States, and Love Hearts here in the UK), are certainly appropriate in terms of the timing and location of this confectionary’s invention. The idea originated, once again, from a factory in the North of England (specifically in Elland, Yorkshire) c. 1850 (see Wordplay, n.d.). Once again, however, specialized machinery is needed, thus meaning that this solution is unlikely to work in the kitchen either.[6] Ultimately, therefore, no matter whether one thinks of going for lettered rock or for conversation lozenges, it is worth remembering how difficult it is to create

[5] This, also a rather traditional end-of-dinner flavour – think here only of After-Eight mints, perhaps linking to the digestive benefits that have been associated with peppermint (e.g., Sali & Vitetta, 2007).

[6] I is worth noting that the conversation lozenges do not really fit as a typical fairground food, despite being described as such by May (2016). The reason being that in order to make these sweets one required a large high-pressure stamping machine. Initially, the sweets would all have been manufacturer at Dobson’s factory in Yorkshire.

personalised versions of either of these traditional confectionary items using the original form. We therefore await the development of a practicable and novel solution to the delivery of lettering in candy.

Summary

At Kitchen Theory, idea desire is to presenting the diner with a bag of bite-sized pieces of personalized rock positively-valenced nostalgic memories will be triggered (cf. Leonor, Lake, & Guerra, 2018). This traditional sweet undoubtedly fits with the festive mind-set of a trip to the seaside funfair (see May, 2016; Richardson, 2013). As such, it is hoped that the personalized bag of sweets will hopefully set the tone for the meal that has just drawn to a close. Our aim is to highlight this food's connection with the seaside funfair, a theme running through several of the dishes that we have been working on recently. And, by using the vehicle of a traditional confectionary form, one that has always contained a phrase, our hope is to end the fairground-themed meal with a message from the past.

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FIGURE LEGENDS

Figure 1. Bite-sized pieces of seaside rock. A nostalgic and positively-valenced item of candy associated with the seaside funfare here in the UK.