



ADAPTIVE PACKAGING



Figure 1: Ora by the Sea (Guyett, 2021)

Since 2018, Ora (figure 1) has been dealing with the physical challenges associated with relapsing/remitting multiple sclerosis (MS). The condition affects them in a variety of ways, particularly with muscle strength and general dexterity. For Ora, like many others with MS, encountering product packaging that presents a significant or occasionally insurmountable obstacle, is a regular occurrence. The physical actions on which these packaging examples rely, and that able-bodied users take for granted, are often weakened by the condition.

If the object of packaging design is to attract users and facilitate their introduction to a new product, then why are the needs of users like Ora disregarded? In most cases, the answer lies with the corporate design philosophy of designing for the 'majority'. It is thought that to design for this faction is to cater to the needs of the widest consumer base. This, however, is a fallacy. As distilled by Victor Papynek:

"All too often designers ... find themselves accused of designing for the minority... We all belong to special needs groups. We all need transportation, communication, products, tools, shelter and clothing. If we lump together all the seemingly little minorities... , if we combine all these "special" needs, we find that we have designed for the majority after all."

(Papynek, 1985, pp.63-68)

To perform for the widest consumer base possible, packaging must be able to adapt to the needs of the true majority. Users with disabilities, like Ora, should not have to adapt to packaging which does not consider their requirements. It is the purpose of this essay to explore the specific needs of those with multiple sclerosis, the steps currently being taken to meet these needs within the market, and finally how this more inclusive design philosophy can be guided into the future of packaging.

INTRO- DUCTION



Figure 2: Ora Struggling With Detergent (Guyett, 2022)

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an autoimmune disease which affects the brain and the spinal cord. Damage caused to the central nervous system by the disease manifests as a variety of physically challenging symptoms; including (but not limited to) muscle weakness, balance and coordination issues, chronic pain, fatigue. MS is a life-long condition with no cure. Clinically, it is treated with medication which only reduces the speed at which the disease progresses. The chronic and developing nature of the illness makes the needs of users with multiple sclerosis highly specified yet constantly evolving. Hence, the response from a design perspective should emphasize packaging's ability to adapt to the diversity of MS symptoms.

Figure 3: Ora Struggling With Box (Guyett, 2022)



Figure 4: Ora Struggling With Jar (Guyett, 2022)

The progression of Multiple Sclerosis can compound to make life in a society designed primarily for the needs of the able-bodied a consistent struggle. Product packaging represents a significant daily obstacle. For someone with muscle weakness or chronic pain, the lids of vacuum sealed jars can be difficult to open (figure 4), polypropylene overwrap packaging can be too evasive to remove for someone with dexterity issues, and cardboard delivery boxes can be too stiff and unwieldy for someone with balance and coordination issues (figure 3). Designers have a binding moral and social responsibility to rectify these evident and profoundly impacting faults within the contemporary packaging environment.

SECTION 1

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

“Inaccessible products and packaging can cause unnecessary physical pain or discomfort, stress and frustration, and can undermine a person’s health, independence and self-esteem.”

(Accessible Product Design Alliance, 2021, p.2)

Despite the glaring issues that remain in the packaging industry, there has been an amicable effort in recent years to produce more considered and inclusive packaging solutions. The Microsoft Adaptive Controller packaging (figure 6) provides users with not only a lower resistance opening tab, but also includes built-in hinges, allowing the packaging to unfurl automatically. Likewise, the EEASY Lid (figure 5) provides users with a means of breaking the vacuum seal of a jar before twisting off the lid, making the latter task exponentially easier. Solutions such as these are model examples of how considered design can enhance the lives of not only disabled users like Ora, but also the able-bodied.

Figure 5: The EEASY Lid (CCT, n.d)



Whilst inclusive packaging design is beginning to flourish within the traditional packaging market, the sector is being driven primarily on a macro level by the push towards sustainability, rather than inclusivity. This environmentally conscious shift will result in a fundamental alteration of not only how packaging is designed, but the relationship it has with the user. Whilst the goal of sustainability in packaging is an important one, it is essential that the inclusivity and accessibility of these eco solutions is of primary consideration, and not left catching up with the rest of the sector, as has been the case previously.



Figure 6: Microsoft Adaptive Controller (Microsoft, 2018)

“It benefits everybody to have a package that opens a lot faster, with less hassle.”

(Luckett, 2018 cited in Bach, 2018)



Figure 7: Inclusive Packaging (Jansen, 2011)

SECTION 2

EASY-OPEN PACKAGING



Figure 8: Wild Deoderant (Wild, 2021)

It is undeniable that the future of packaging will be based on re-usability. To combat the unacceptable levels of waste the single-use packaging model creates, user's will be encouraged to adopt personal containers to purchase, transport and store products. Already, reusable storage options such as mason jars (Figure 9) are being used in grocery stores, and environmentally conscious businesses are offering products and services that revolve around reusable packaging, such as is seen with Wild Deodorant (figure 8). As these products are designed to be kept for a lifetime and used regularly, it is incidental that users will demand a degree of personalisation with their packaging. The needs and preferences of individuals will be a primary purchasing driver when it comes to reusable packaging.

Figure 9: Spaghetti Jar (EcoRefill, 2019)



Figure 10: Humanrace Cosmetics (Humanrace, n.d)

However, from observing examples of reusable, personal packaging, it is clear that there are shortfalls regarding their inclusivity. None depicted include design elements which adapt to the needs of any disabled user, let alone those with multiple sclerosis. The Wild Deodorant packaging (figure 8) has a smooth, machined metal surface, that would be challenging for users with muscle weakness or chronic fatigue to maintain a secure grip of. Likewise the lid of the packaging lacks easy-open features as simple as a lip, which users with dexterity problems or muscle pain would require to open the product. The same criticisms may also be laid upon the mason jar (figure 9), with the contorted and stiff latch design providing a significant hurdle to closing the jar, and the smooth glass sides lacking in any grip assistance.

It is evident, therefore, that there is a gap in the present focus of the embryonic reusable packaging market. Moving forward, a shift towards the needs of disabled users, such as Ora, is required for the industry to truly embrace inclusivity and empower everyone to make more sustainable choices.

SECTION 3

REUSABLE PACKAGING





Figure 11: Ora Opening Box (Guyett, 2022)



“I don’t
want to feel
invalidated by
my ability to
open a jar.”

(Hambleton, 2022)

Figure 12: Ora Opening Jar (Guyett, 2022)

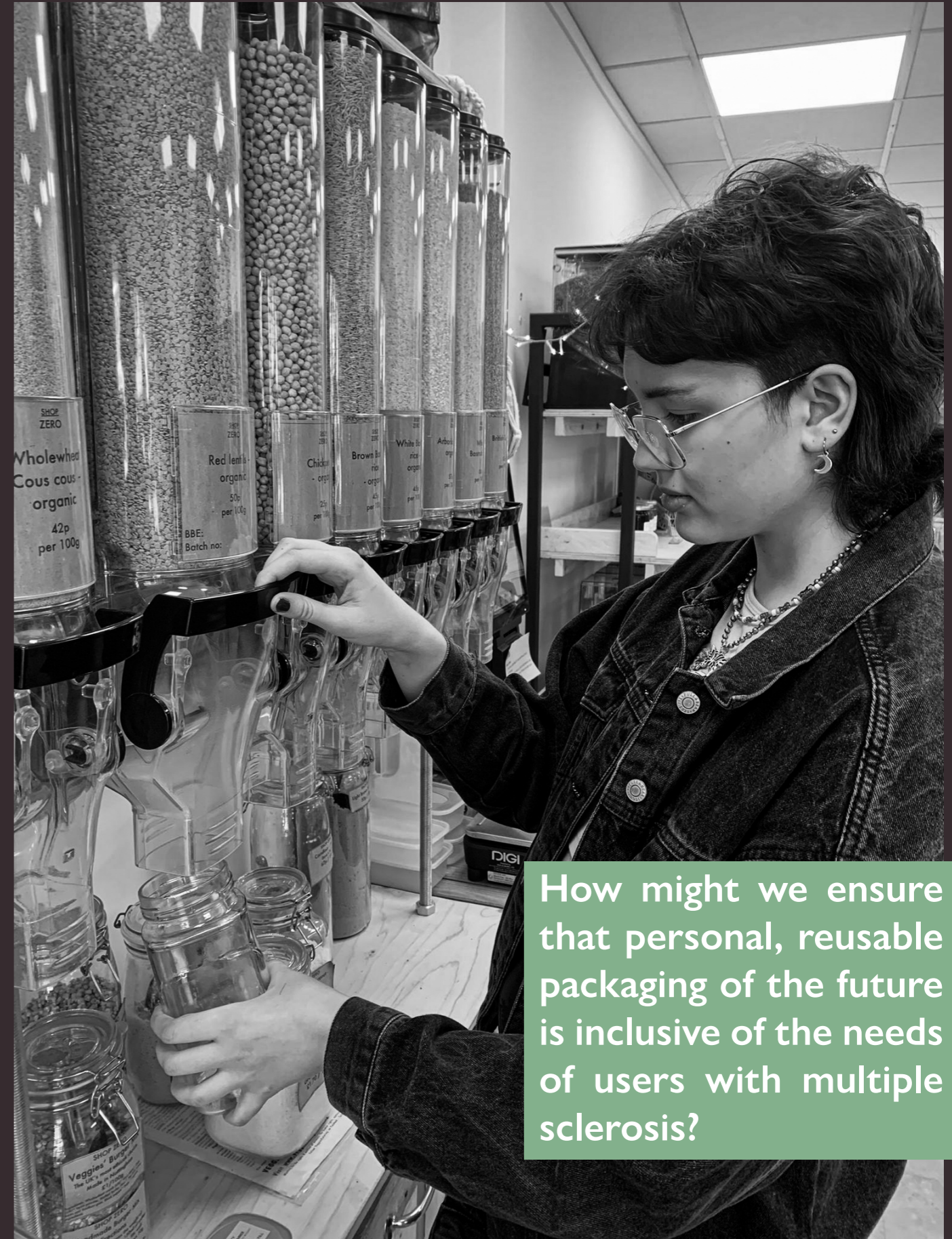
It is evident that inclusivity and accessibility has been at the bottom of the agenda for the majority of the contemporary packaging market. Only recently have the resources and attention been directed towards tackling this problem in a commercial setting. However, the trend of inclusivity falling by the wayside cannot be allowed to perpetuate as the industry moves on from the single-use model to re-usability. Innovations such as those seen with the Microsoft Adaptive Controller and the EEASY Lid, must be applied in earnest and with equal vivacity to the reusable packaging of the future. Disabled users like Ora demand and deserve primary consideration during the design process, as their needs are of most significance. To design for users like them, is to design for everyone.

The personal, reusable packaging of the future must:

- Enable users with disabilities to make use of reuseable packaging and refilling services in a frictionless manner.
- Implement ergonomic and anthropometric design features which empower disabled users to use the product.
- Consider the needs of a wide demographic of users with a variety of special design needs.
- Ensure that the design is intuitive for users with and without disabilities.

Therefore, as designers,
we must ask :

CONCLUSION



How might we ensure that personal, reusable packaging of the future is inclusive of the needs of users with multiple sclerosis?

Figure 13: Ora Using Refilling Service (Guyett, 2022)

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- Figure 13: Guyett, S. 2022. *Ora Using Refilling Service*. [Photograph]

FIGURE LIST



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