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<div align="center">Book Jacket Design Analysis</div>

Design can be defined in many different ways that will be explored in this rhetorical analysis of the book jacket for the 2018 hardcover release of *Calypso* by David Sedaris (see fig. 1). The book jacket, designed by Peter Mendelsund (www.petermendelsund.com/covers), is styled as a piece of cut wood, complete with the feeling of the different textures of wood grain. The image on the front is of three wood knots arranged as eyes and a nose, with one straight horizontal marker line to create a mouth.
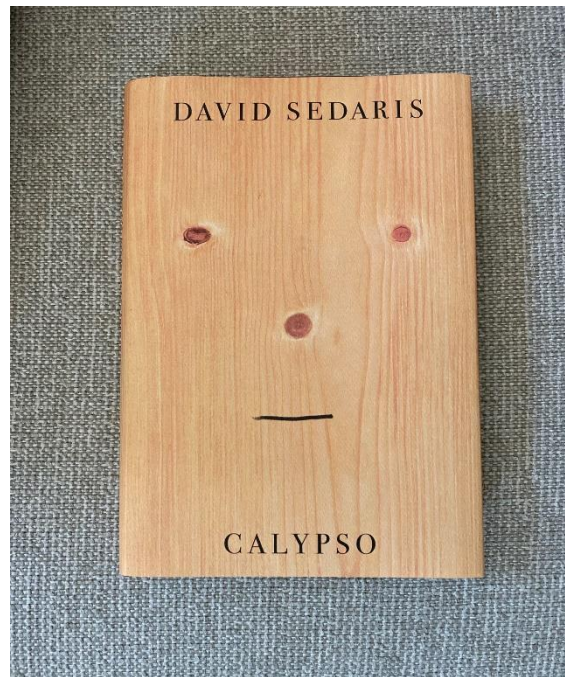

Fig. 1: Photo of Front of Book Jacket

In *Design: A Very Short Introduction*, John Heskett states that design is "one of the basic characteristics of what it is to be human, and an essential determinant of the quality of human life" (2). However, Heskett argues that, overall, the definition of design can be quite confusing due to its versatility as a term (3-5). One central theme that Heskett develops in defining design is that of influence from a number of different sources. Multiple influences are subtle but evident in the design of *Calypso*'s book jacket, with the background image of wood grain being one of the cohesive elements.

Robin Williams, author of *The Non-Designer's Design Book*, also details elements of design that have helped shape my own definition. I have loosely defined design as a plan and process given that the term can be applied in many different ways. As it relates to the visual

components of design with regard to the Sedaris book jacket, I can also add the elements discussed in the Williams text, which include the principles of contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity (13). Therefore, I would define design as a visual plan and process utilizing the elements of contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity.

David Sedaris is an essayist and humorist, but *Calypso* represents a slight departure from his typical humor at times. According to the March 2012 TED Talk entitled "Designing books is no laughing matter. Ok, it is." by book cover designer Chip Kidd, a jacket design must work in tandem with the content of the book itself, giving "form to content" (Kidd 2:23). The book jacket for *Calypso* is very simplistic in nature, incorporating imagery that managed to capture the author's inherent reputation as a humorist while relating the more serious nature of the content of this particular book.

One could interpret the marker stroke for the mouth as reflective of the author's style as well; David Sedaris is well-known for using bold markers to draw and write in and on his books during his many book signings. The result is a flat expression of a face. In James Elkins's book *How to Use Your Eyes*, Elkins devotes a chapter to observing and analyzing facial features. In this document, many of the features named in detail in Elkins's book are absent. Elkins writes that "the majority of facial muscles have nothing to do but pull the skin into different expressions" (146). Even in their absence, however, one can observe or attempt to assign the aforementioned flat expression to the face created by the wood knots as it relates to the content of the book.

The author's name is in all caps in a black serif font on top of the front of the jacket, and the book name is on bottom in the same font, style, and size. The spine (see fig. 2) utilizes the same font and color, as do the blurbs on the back. This is a unifying element.
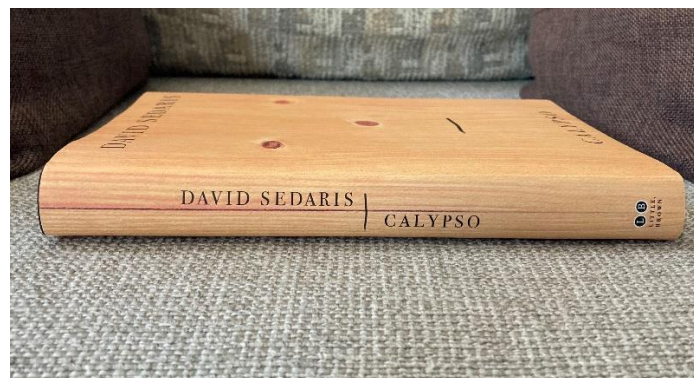

Fig. 2: Photo of Spine

Most of the contrasting elements are subtle. While the jacket has a uniform look throughout with the wood pattern, contrast is only slightly evident on the back (see fig. 3). The designer has utilized contrast in attributing the blurbs to their authors and their original publication points. The arrangement of the blurbs aligns the quotes to the left margin of the page with the attributions on the right in bold. The contrast of the bold attributions against the light quotes draws understated attention to the names and publications of those making the quotes, which is somewhat effective in enticing readers to take a closer look. For example, Patton

Oswalt is attributed to the first blurb, which would be directed towards a particular audience. While the other names on the back of the jacket might not be quite as recognizable to mainstream audiences, their publication platforms, such as NPR, are more well-known.
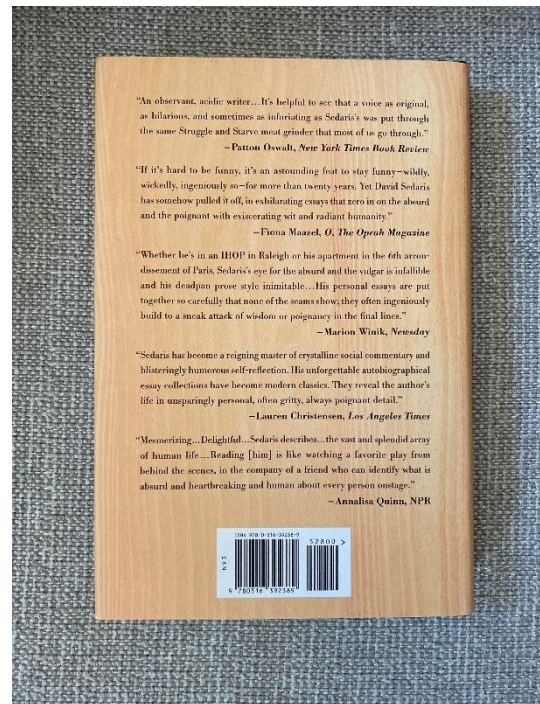

Fig. 3: Photo of Back of Book Jacket

The font and background on the jacket flaps offer a stronger example of contrast. While the wood grain on the outside of the jacket is light and the font is black, the jacket flaps take the opposite approach, inverting the color scheme while utilizing the same font (see fig. 4). The right jacket flap adds the additional contrasting elements provided by images of the author's previous book covers.
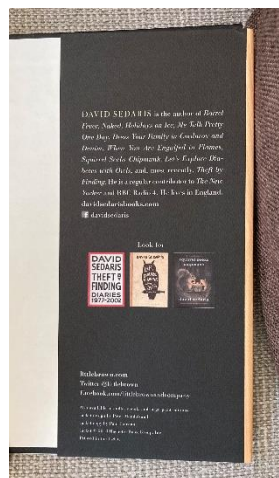

Fig. 4: Photo of Right Jacket Flap

When focusing on repetition, the most obvious examples on the jacket involve the font. The font is uniform throughout the jacket with the exception of the flaps. The subtle contrasts between the sizes of the font between the front, spine, and back of the jacket offer a repeating element as well. Additionally, the wood grain background is consistent throughout the exterior of the jacket. The marker stroke used on the cover for the face's mouth is repeated as a vertical line on the spine separating the author's name and book title.

The principle of alignment is demonstrated by a centered approach on the front cover of the jacket, aligning in a triangular fashion among the author's name, the face graphic, and the book title. The author's name and book title are arranged in a diagonal fashion on the spine, with the author's name on the top left separated by the vertical marker stroke and the book title on the bottom right. While the alignment of the blurbs on the back cover is fairly effective, more white space would likely be an improvement that would keep the print from overwhelming the reader.

Finally, proximity is most evident on the back of the jacket with the grouping of the blurbs. On the front, the author's name and the book title are on opposite ends of the layout. However, this is where the alignment is the more distinguishing principle, as the reader's eye is drawn from author to graphic to title by the implied triangular line.

The book jacket from *Calypso* incorporates many of the defined principles of design quite well, although some are more evident than others. Skilled designers use the principles to varying degrees to create effective products. The overall result of the design of this particular jacket is an effective and memorable book cover that is a strong reflection of both the author and the content in the text.

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