

Narrative Level, Internal Time Consciousness and Narrative Ethics: Susan Sontag's Narrative Art as Evincing in *Death Kit*

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Abstract: Literary critics have swarmed to shower their comments—markedly diverse comments indeed—on *Death Kit*. Being not intended for propounding some dualistic interpretation of the novel, this essay ventures to expatiate on the novel's narrative art manifesting itself in a trinity comprising (1) the technique of narrative level, (2) the technique of internal time consciousness, and (3) the ethic for carrying on the narration. By bringing the extradiegetic, the intradiegetic and the metadiegetic to an ultimate silence, Sontag is meant to suggest that the hero Diddy has finished freighting his death kit and is on the way to the terminal demise. It is by describing how his consciousness performs such leaps and bounds in the temporal stream that his past life repeatedly gains access to his present life and that his present life would instantaneously turn into his past life, and that his future is nonexistent at all except for its sporadic emergences as his dreamlike reverie would induce them. Such leaps and bounds of his consciousness which succeed in acquiring their definite shapes by following the temporal random driftiness have been incessantly intensifying the anguish stemming from the reminiscence of his excruciating life in the past and serve to debunk his expectation that he can restore his vitality by committing a murder in the course of his imaginary life. The falsehood inherent in his imaginary life compels him to realistically cast once more about the advisability of actually committing suicide. Moreover, narration goes in the novel in very strict compliance with an explicit ethics she imposes on herself. This serves to throw light upon Sontag's approach towards the US government's propaganda aimed at sanctifying the Vietnam War and the catastrophe brought to that country by American troops. In this way the moral caliber of the novel is vindicated.

Keywords: *Death Kit*, Narrative Level, Internal Time Consciousness, Narrative Ethics

1. Introduction

Four years later after the publication of her debut novel *The Benefactor*, Sontag created her second fictional work *Death Kit*. It recounts a tale of an ordinary American who cannot endure his middle-age crisis, therefore, choosing to commit suicide to end the agony of living. He dreams living a vigorous and bold life during his coma but it turns out to be a hallucinatory life; ultimately he meets with his final death—the death of his consciousness. To put it in another way, Diddy's story, becomes “a fable about how human beings lose control of the meaning of existence” [1].

Criticism of *TB*¹ were respectful but mixed; whereas response to Sontag's second novel *DK* is frustrating. Compared with the stinging criticism, Sohnya Sayre's commentary is neutralized, who claims *DK* is the sequel of *TB*, “though a distance separates the European Hippolyte and his absurdist homilies on self-love from the American Diddy and his unremitting self-disparagement” [2]. The two novels explore the cerebral state of its hero away from the control of consciousness—Diddy's mental disembowelment recalls the

¹ In this essay, only the initial letters of each key word in the title of a fictive work by Sontag is taken; and such initial letters are put together to function as an abbreviation of the work in question. For example, The abbreviation *DK* stands for *Death Kit*. The abbreviation *SRW* stands for *Styles of Radical Will*. The abbreviation *AI* stands for *Against Interpretation*. The abbreviation *AST* stands for *At the Same Time*.

efforts of Hippolyte in *TB* to extinguish personality. Carl Rollyson claims "Sontag's *DK* already (wrote) herself into a dead end" [3]. Eliot Fremont-Smith found the novel "both tedious and insensitive to the craft of fiction" [4]. Denis Donoghue in *the New York Review of Books* could not help ridiculing her capacity of English expression, "She is not a natural writer, certainly not a natural novelist. She writes by insistence, the will doing the work of the imagination" [5]. Larry McCaffery's thesis is one of a limited number of deprecatory articles which approve of the experimental technique Sontag adopted. He extolled it as "one of the most interesting and successful experimental novels to appear in the 1960s" [6], especially under the context that American fiction was on the decline because of lack of formal ingenuity. No matter what position a review might take toward Sontag's work, she writes in such a way that commentators are compelled to argue for or against her. As Benjamin Moser wrote in *Sontag: Her life and Work*, "one of Susan Sontag's strengths was that anything that could be said about her by others was said, first and best, by Susan Sontag" [7]. Throughout her whole writing career, she set about to improve herself and was engaged in a project of self-transformation. Starting from the exploration of the dreamland, she would vigorously banish anything that fogged her perception of reality when she found her effort exhausting.

This essay is not proposed a dualistic interpretation of the text, but serves as expounding the narrative art manifested in the novel from the following three aspects: silence permeating narrative level, the stasis of inner time consciousness and the narrative ethics.

2. Silence Permeating the Narrative Level

In this part, focus is posited on expounding how Diddy's consciousness gradually steps into exacerbation via narrative level, up to the annihilation of the subject of consciousness. Silence of consciousness indicates the thorough death of the subject of consciousness.

This essay primarily relies on Gerard Genette's classification and definition on narrative level. In *Narrative Discourse*, Genette claims: "Any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed" [8]. The event a narrative recounts is placed at "a first level" which he calls "extradiegetic." The narrative constituted by the narrative acting is "the second narrative," which is imbedded in the first narrative and called by him as "diegetic" or "intradiegetic." He further explains "the narrator of the second narrative can be a character in the first one, and that the act of narrating which produces the second narrative is an event recounted in the first one" [8]. If there is another narrative in the second degree, the other narrative distinct from the intradiegetic, which he will call "metadiegetic." To sum up, the character in the first narrative is likely to serve as the narrator in the second narrative. Inside the second degree of narration, narrator can further produce his oral or written narrating. Therefore, a big narrative possibly consists of

several levels of smaller narratives; each narrative is presented in the form of embedment.

In light of Genette's classification of narrative, there are three narrative strata in the novel of *DK*. The extradiegetic is heterodiegetic, in which Sontag serves as the omniscient narrator recounting Diddy's death-life-death story. Inside the extradiegetic is Diddy's hallucinatory life that constitutes the intradiegetic, in which Diddy exists not only as the character but as the narrator turning up in his transformational tale. The fragmentary reminiscence of his past life and the inverse transformation from cowardice to bravery of his real life constitute the fabric of his narration in the hallucinatory space. Inside Diddy's fantasized life, a tale of Wolf-boy is inserted, which is created in the first-person narration, but appearing in the form of dream, hence, the tale of the Wolf-boy is embodied with the double fictiveness. On surface it is a tale of Wolf-boy recounted by Diddy, who is not the character but the narrator outside Wolf-boy's tale; in fact, Wolf-boy is Diddy's metamorphosed self, and the two are homogeneous, Wolf-boy is the metamorphosis of Diddy in the fictive tale. The story is obviously a commentary on Diddy's own estrangement from society and from his animal nature. Therefore Diddy is metamorphosed into the character and becomes the narrator in the Wolf-boy tale.

In the extradiegetic, Sontag tells the story of an ordinary American—Diddy Dalton, who feeds up with his life, so commits suicide. The cause that triggers him to commit suicide is not unilateral, but the impact of a succession of crises, accumulated and deteriorating from childhood to middle age. The extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narration allows Sontag adequate space to intrude into Diddy's tale to focus on the alienation of the modern people. In a sense, Diddy is an embodiment of the modern people caught up in everydayness.

Diddy's traumatic memory is the important fabric of the intradiegetic, scattered in the form of fragmentary reminiscence, and pieced together through the flashback of consciousness in his coma. In a word, Diddy's frustrating life experiences turning up in fragmentary reminiscence constitute his revised second life in the intradiegetic; likewise, accounts for his extreme action of suicide in the extradiegetic. "Running down" becomes the most appropriate sketch of the world outside and inside his consciousness, linking the intradiegetic and extradiegetic narration. He increasingly perceives that he has only a life, but is hardly alive, struggling like "a fish cast up on the beach" [9]. His problem is that he can neither live a worthwhile life, fighting for the meaning of life; nor can he live like other people idling away "in a dense fluid." Thus he seizes on suicide as the only way to release him from the excruciating experience of living.

Different from the image of a failure in life, the timid and the good for nothing Diddy, has successfully transmuted in his fictive second life. But it turns out that his "life-in-death" is the equilibrium of a "death-in-life". Insofar as death is concerned, he has an ambiguous feeling: he does not believe death is the end of life; instead, death gives birth to revival and death coexists with rebirth. "(Since) death has refused his hectic, inept petition", he remains "the tenant of his life" and

he has the responsibility to “keep the property in decent repair” [9]. The desire for a second life sustains Diddy to run his dreamed life anew.

The intradiegetic is woven around Diddy’s search for versification of his murdering behavior. Only if he had killed Incardona, could he successfully exorcise his own death. Since the authenticity of his murdering of “death” is increasingly questioned, his fantasy of recovering his vitality by transferring his death to someone else is attested to be a journey to death.

Hester serves as Incardona’s foil, whose function is considerably complicated and ambiguous in the intradiegetic. On one aspect, she is the source of Diddy’s courage, supporting him to fight for his second life; on the other aspect, she is his life drainer, and her vitality constitutes a counteraction of his vitality. The disadvantage of her blindness poses Diddy a superior position to condescend upon her agony. Through voluntarily undertaking the responsibility to take care of her, he finds a method to transcend the agony he has experienced to someone vulnerable than him. Consequently, he transforms his identity from the subject who suffers to the subject that can gaze at others’ agony. It is as if he needs Incardona to realize his death exorcism; likewise, he needs another one to substitute him to endure suffering out of seeing. Hester is such an incomparable candidate. With the “good” intention of redeeming Hester that actually benefits himself, he transforms his former negativity into an active engagement in the world. Although much of the middle portion in the intradiegetic involves Diddy’s active attitude towards life and work, he never completely turns away from death. As she becomes tenacious, somber and independent, the new-found energy that has sustained Diddy is ebbing away. He experiences epiphany before death, “Life=the world. Death=being completely inside one’s own head” [9].

The extradiegetic correlates with the intradiegetic via causality—Diddy’s overdose of sleeping pills results in his hallucinatory second life; while the intradiegetic and the metadiegetic share thematic correlation—the similar life experiences induce Diddy to produce a strong apathy for Wolf-boy Hiawatha. All in all the three narrative strata are connected through a communal theme—death. The events happening in the three narrative levels all point to silence of consciousness of its character; or rather the death of Diddy and his second self. The narrative level of *DK* is presented in the form of overlapping with the exterior being the extradiegetic, followed by the intradiegetic and the metadiegetic. The metadiegetic and the intradiegetic constitute the framework of the narrative, relating Diddy’s assembling of his death kit in his hallucinatory life. The ingenious dream-within-a-dream in the narrative level is regarded as an innovation *DK* has accomplished in its narrative structure.

3. Stasis of the Internal Time Consciousness

DK concentrates on “the estrangement” of the modern

people, going through hard consciousness struggle during their spiritual journey to self-identification, but fails to reach self-redemption; therefore, what awaits them is to commit suicide. Death seemingly becomes the solely effective method to resolve the modern people’s predicament. Death is also a way of reconciliation between what she would not accept in the past and what she had to accept now. Jerome Maunsell pointed out the creative resonance about the name “Diddy” and “Daddy”: Diddy, the protagonist of *DK* is 33 when he dies; Sontag’s father died at 33 when he failed to come back to China; Sontag herself was 33 when she wrote *DK*. “Did he, Did he die?” Sontag now recognized the motif of ‘false death’ running through all her work up to that time----It was also there in the half death of Frau Anderson in *The Benefactor* and would reappear in her film----rooted in her own uncertainty over her father’s death.” [10] The recognition inspired her to create “Diddy” in *DK* and brought her to accept what had happened. “It’s finished, Daddy did die.” [11] She could understand and closed the door of expecting his father’s coming home.

How to illuminate the pre-consciousness before death is a challenging task for a fledged writer, not to say it is for such an inexperienced writer as Sontag. The factors that Larry Caffery attributes Sontag’s vivid depiction of one’s pre-consciousness before death can be summarized as followed: sensation pertaining to death and death images are pervasive to foil death atmosphere [6]. Through juxtaposing the sensation one feels in illness with that Diddy experiences in his hallucination to death, this novel enables its readers to mimic the experience of the pre-consciousness before one’s death. Meanwhile, Diddy’s hallucinatory life abounds with images of darkness, decay, and death.

Different from Caffery’s analysis of how to actualize the authenticity of death in *DK*, this part will dwell on expounding “the immanent time of the flow of consciousness” [12], initiated by Husserl who contends that time is indispensable from one’s consciousness, and there is no gap between time and consciousness. In order to distinguish the conventional perception of the objective time from the time inherent in consciousness, Husserl calls the latter “internal time consciousness.” According to him, the time of the past, the time of the present, and the time of the future can coexist at the instant present by a certain psychological association. Hence, time has transcending the limitation of the conventional linear existence, is embodied with personal emotion. The past can be linked with the present by recollection through an objective that bears the same emotional association; likewise the future can turn up at present via anticipation. Time is the unification of the temporal flux among the past of the present, the future of the present, and the present of the present. Stasis of the internal time consciousness in the text refers to the temporary ceasing of the objective time, with the past and the future stopped at the present; or memory related with the past and anticipation of the future are generated from the stimulation of the present. Hence, time is ostensibly posed in a state of stasis.

Murdering Incardona is the primarily important incident in Diddy’s hallucinatory life; it also promotes the development

of the plot. For this reason, this incident and the following occurrences closely associated with it is set as the present that Diddy lives in his hallucinatory life. The present leaps back to the past, correlating with it by dint of memory. And memory is envisioned via the representation of the past incidents. Among the numerous incidents of the past, Incardona's death reminds him of Andy's cremation. Time shuttles back to the past when he was eleven years old. The two incidents are related to each other is due to the emotional affinity. Diddy's regretting for his imprudent behavior of murdering Incardona is associated with his remorse of betrayal of his dear friend Andy. Andy is a doll sent by Mary as a gift to him bearing his childhood recollection, pleasant or unpleasant; Andy is also a carrier to transfer the insults he receives from others. Out of winning recognition from his peers, he sacrificed Andy into the Halloween bonfire and lied to them that Andy was the doll stolen from his niece. In order to reduce the remorse and pain he had to suffer, he successfully transferred his possession of the doll to his fictive niece Ann, and made up a tragic story: Ann had so miserable a time after losing her dear doll that she cried her eyes blind. Through this displacement, his regret for Andy correspondingly transfers to his regret for Ann. Blindness, the same attribute enables a correlation between the fictive Ann and the hallucinatory Hester; the wrong he did to Ann is subsequently transferred to his desire for restitution to Hester. The homogeneity between Hester and Ann becomes apparent in the seduction scene occurring in the toilet of the train, where he repeatedly asks Hester if she ever cried. His curiosity does nothing but establish the correlation between Hester's blindness and her customary crying. Thus, the reparation Diddy addresses to Hester is that he should make for his wrongdoing on Ann.

The present he is experiencing is imbued with his self suspicion. On one aspect, he is eager to demonstrate his superiority to Incardona in vitality by taking away the latter's life without efforts; on another aspect, he reveals a feeling of regret for his rashness, "I've got a murderer inside me, thinks Diddy the Mortified. Why did I think I was such an amiable fellow?" [9] Murder he committed humiliates him, transforming him into an indecent man. By contrast, the considerate help he confers on Hester sublimates his morality. Murder and redemption constitute the popularization of his conflicting humanity. Diddy recognizes his present guilt done on Incardona will pose a threat to his attachment to Hester in future. He can not ignore his "tainted" present; nor can he anticipating a hopeful life through forming an alliance with Hester. The restitution he proposes to offer to Hester should also apply to the Incardona case. In this way, Hester and Incardona go together. Their destinies will closely be linked via the restitution he proposes to make either for Hester or for Incardona. He pays a visit to Incardona's widow. Although his visit to Myra Incardona doesn't resolve his puzzle of what causes his death, at least the information she supplies prevents him from drawing an unequivocal verdict of guilt. Given his consistent and brutal character recounted by his wife, his investigation spares himself the thought that he is guilty: what he did at the past present help and relieve his families from

domestic violence they suffered. He fills Incardona's place as husband and father in the present future but Myra's sexual temptation reminds Diddy of the menace of castration he suffered during his childhood. The past traumatic memory and the future restitution he is to offer is successfully connected via his "present" responsibility that he assumes to take. At the bottom of his consciousness, he has a fearful emotion toward the figure of "the Big Mother." His motive to console is at the cost of losing his independence. This incident in childhood seems to vivify his perception of the marital relation with Myra in future. As he can not shed his guilt to Andy; neither can he shun the ghost of Incardona. If he considered making restitution for his families, he would inevitably inherit the lawful burden from him—his vulgar wife and disobedient boy. He would resume to the predicament of suffering sexual castration. The peril of losing masculinity frustrates him; however, he has constantly tortured by the questioning of his conscience for not paying his due owed to Incardona's families.

The past memories repetitively appear in Diddy's present hallucination, doubling the frustration and anxiety he is experiencing in his fictive reality. Diddy expects to fulfill the undone of the past in his life-in-death present, but confusingly finds the endeavor he makes at the instant present cannot figure out the problems left in the past; therefore, he has to expect to solve the double quandary in the intangible future. By dint of having Incardona's corneal transplanted to Hester, Hester will prolong his ceased life. By dint of taking good care of her, he will pay off his debts owed to Incardona and Ann. But the problem is as such: neither can he find the way out of the hospital; nor can he arrive at the railway station to catch the Privateer to fetch Incardona's corneal in time. The present unresolved predicament is continuously projected in the form of dream, finally the past and the future will not find their way out as he can not figure out his present confusion; namely, whether it is reliable of his murdering behavior.

DK is concentrated on presenting the one-week consciousness turmoil prior to Diddy's death. While the narration lingers on the present, it will suddenly leap to the past memories and dissolve along with the recollection; the future generally presents itself in Diddy's anticipated dream; therefore, the narration in *DK* consists of the retrospection of the past trauma, together with the frequent flashing of his present hallucinatory crime and the restitution in future. If "guilt" attests to the release of his repressed evil in his humanity, "restitution" makes the readers see his aspiration for the good of humanity. The conflict between good and evil is reflected in his self questioning of the murder he committed and of whether he should accept the due punishment arising from his guilt. When he is no longer irritated by the moral judgment of "the guilty" or "the innocent," he apprehends "that is what death is about" [9]. Once he is dead, he will free from the annoyance out of the moral evaluation he has to confront in real life. He completes the transformation of his perception of death: "Death=an encyclopedia of life" [9], and gets ready to accept what has posed for him. With the ultimate silence of his consciousness, he is absolved from the guilt of

the past, the punishment of the present, and the restitution of the future. Death dissolves everything, with the past, the present and the future disappearing in the flux of time consciousness.

4. Narrative Ethics Evinced in *DK*

DK does not cease at lamenting Diddy's existential angst he suffers or reproving for his inaction against the alienated forces, but has this world obscurely intrude into Diddy's self-reflection via his observation of the decadence of the exterior world so as to lay a hint for the disclosure of the atrocities the US troop committed in the Vietnam War and for the unveiling of the deceptive propaganda of the Mass Media played in the war.

Elizabeth Bruss noticed Sontag's dilemma of aesthetic emotion that she experienced in the late of 1960s and her movement from aesthetic radicalism to complicated ethics questioning. She argues that Sontag's second essay collection *Style of Radical Will* reveals such a dilemma: "she arranged the book...to chart the progress of a dilemma from its first, quizzical appearance...to its eventual although far from final resolution" [13]. Critics are inclined to believe her fictional works are the practice of her critical theory, but the vice versus. Likewise, her essays are the footnote to her fictive works. Before she published her second essay collection *Style of Radical Will*, she had completed her second fictional creation *DK*, which is not only reduced to the discussion of her perception to aesthetic matter, but embodied the fictionist's profound humanist concern for the Vietnamese and her fury for the atrocity that the US troop committed in the Vietnam War. In *DK*, Sontag's moral position of the Vietnam War as a novelist is no longer concealed behind her appeal for the radical aesthetic form, but emerges in the form of irony.

Before Sontag's engagement in her ironical attack of the inhuman behaviors American troop committed in the Vietnam War, there is an implication which project American government's negligence of the domestic responsibility it should have undertaken, but was heavily involved in the overseas, aggressive war. There is a detailed depiction of a domestic, worn-out train station:

Diddy can't help marking the steady deterioration of the surfaces and furniture of this station...the floor, walls columns, bronze statue, information booth, clock, ticket windows, newspaper stand, wooden benches look more indelibly stained and grimier and more thickly littered. [9]

The run-down railway station serves as a minimal panorama to the America in decline. The sense of decay is not only demonstrated through the decoration and the items inside, but through the comment and exclamation Diddy makes on noticing them. "Not only mere negligence is at work here, surely. A question of policy or principle.... But isn't there a good deal to be said for keeping a doomed place clean and in decent repair?" [9] The commentary here has a dual voice: it could be Diddy's reflection on the decline, or it could be an obscure attack Sontag launched at the American government for its negligence of the livelihood of her people but engaging

in the foreign aggression at the cost of consuming large quantity of national sources and sacrificing millions of the lives of the American youth.

The Vietnam War is literally "unspeakable" in the novel, looming in the background of the novel. As she mentioned in an interview that there lies an implicit relationship between the war and her novel, "I've often thought that *DK* could have been called *why are we in Vietnam?* Because it gets into the kind of senseless brutality and self-destructiveness that is ruining America" [14]. There is an allegorical implication that Diddy's journey to death is nothing other than the projection of doom of the US army in the Vietnam War.

Sontag does not directly address her moral stance toward the War, but conveying her position via ironizing the gloss that the Mass Media played in terms of the War. There are two implicit hints that television as an important mass medium has played the role of mind set in the Vietnam War. The first reporting allusive to the war appears in a nightly program. In order to confirm the murder, Diddy turns on the television, but disappointed to find not a little bit of news related to the murder. A bespectacled priest is addressing the nightly sermonette:

Bless upon this great land of freedom, and on our boys fighting overseas to extend those freedoms to the entire world.... Bless those who are strong, that they employ their strength wisely.... and bless those who are weak, that they receive succor and care from their more fortunate brothers". [9]

The actualization of the ironic effect first of all relies on comprehending the social or the political context in which her ironic discourse was produced. Beyond this, it depends on whether her readers can reach a consensus with her in terms of the moral position on the Vietnam War. If the moral position of her readers is opposite to hers, the ironic effect will be blocked.

One of the most distinguished consequences that the 1960s' Counter Culture Movement has brought out is the prevalence of skepticism, although it is not the invention of the 1960s. The skepticism of authority and convention liberates the American's thoughts. Plurality of values and transgression upon the conventional discipline become the typical characteristic of the epoch. There is no common mores for people to observe; nor did they believe there was a genuine fact behind the assumed truth. Things thought, spoken or written became provisional; uncertainty and dissolution of authority evolved into skepticism of what they heard, read or saw. Under such a context the exclusiveness of irony was reinforced. Because of its ambivalent political history in the 1960s, irony is perceived both as a force of liberation and as a mode of elitism. When it means more than it says, it will allow language to realize its function of liberation; reversely, ideas conveyed through irony will return to its speaker and become the language of the elite. Irony Sontag used in *DK* has the risk of not being understood or intentionally ignored by some of her American compatriots. If the audiences of the program choose not to take the liberating function of her discourse and insist on comprehending the sermonette as it sounds, the ironic

effect Sontag would effectuate will fail. Readers as long as they are ready to cling to historical facts and make their evaluation based on the criterion of a universal value will not accord with the glossed propaganda that the priest made. Shameless aggression is converted into a righteous military action promoting the spread of idea of American democracy and freedom; aggressors turn into God's Apostle propagating "succor and care" to his "brothers". Apparently, the discourse she addressed via the priest's voice is not to extol the sublimity of the US's militant invasion. Through the use of irony, readers can easily detect that this is a world upside down, in which deception is glossed into truth and atrocities become virtuous behaviors. Politics colludes with religion; religion becomes the accomplice of politics, bewitching the innocent and the credulous to believe what they saw and heard through television. Apparently, Sontag is loathsome to the assumed justice and virtue, and her attitude toward the deceptive "truth" can be discovered in her essay "On Courage and Resistance": "The justice of a cause does not depend on, and is not enhanced by, the virtue of those who make the assertion. It depends first and last on the truth of a description of a state of affairs that is, truly, unjust and unnecessary" [15].

At the above cited paragraph, Sontag's criticism of the Vietnam War is implicit, as if a camera were posited at some obscure place to objectively record what happened; she does not intrude into the narration. At the second point where the Vietnam War is focalized in close shot. Through Diddy's perspective, Sontag allowed her readers to see brutality and inhumanity of the War:

Just more about the unspeakable war, the one in which territory does not change hands and the sole measure of each victory is how many small-boned yellow bodies, with flesh charred by napalm or shattered by metal, huddle and sprawl on the ground after the battle. Waiting to be counted. [9]

Diddy here exists as the narrator, offering an objective overview of the War. Before brutality and savageness, humanity has totally been castrated. While confronted with the dehumanized atrocities is the prevalence of communal numbness. The newscaster exemplifies the alienated people living in the modern "waste land." "(They) had no news, no information" [9]; they live repetitively and senselessly every day; they are encumbered by deceitful and well-worn lies. Diddy's final monologue—"Lies, but terrible smiling lies"—reinforces the effect of Sontag's criticism of the manipulation of American government upon public opinion. Living in such an absurd world, how can a mental sanity person maintain his conscience as a person? He either chooses to be the accomplice of power status or keep mute to the violence happening before him. There is no neutral stance between right and wrong and between just and unjust.

Sontag, is not satisfied with hiding behind her hero, but constantly reveals self to uphold Diddy's moral position. The moral stand Diddy posits as the hero integrates with which Sontag posed as a novelist. By according with Diddy's moral evaluation, she actually foregrounds her moral position.

Considered as an action performed on this planet and in this

decade, what Diddy has done is barely visible. Set Diddy's deed against the scale of reality, and it seems petty and amateurish. And his lacerating remorse little more than presumption, a kind of boastfulness; at best, the foolish endearing weakness of the overcivilized.

Still, it's right to consider those far more vicious and ample murders being committed, ceaselessly, all over the world. With the assassins scarcely ever suffering the slightest ache of guilt. Why would they? When it's done for one's country, one is cheered for slaying a hundred Incardonas every hour.... And the others, like Diddy, who haven't been licensed, who've stayed out of the arenas where killing is the respectable business of the day, have their corresponding, equally gullible role to enact. [9]

On surface, Sontag is ridiculing Diddy's amateurishness of slaying and folly of regretting through analogizing Diddy's murder of Incardona with the massacre the American army committed in the Vietnam War; in effect, she highly extols Diddy's moral seriousness and self reflection. Sontag would provoke her readers into making a moral judgment than partially believing what the political propaganda promotes. The disclosure of the aggressiveness is actualized via the rhetoric device of irony, which has enhanced the expressive effect other than narrating in a straightforward way. The adoption of irony has rewarded rather than blocked our efforts to discern Sontag's moral position behind her telling as an omniscient narrator by disambiguating the scene so as to assert her moral position. Although irony is not the most typical characteristic of formal expression; the application of it has intensified the effect of Sontag's criticism and strengthened her moral position as a writer.

Sontag's moral position as a novelist is not only reflected in her complicated emotional response to Diddy's self-negation, but also reflected in her piercing through the hypocritical essence of the Vietnam War. It is especially reflected in her appeal to alerting the American to be aware of the degeneration of the moral consciousness in the epoch that the social responsibility of literature is incessantly diminished by the popularization of the Mass Media. In the text of *DK*, television as an important public medium plays the indecent role. TV has evolved into the propaganda machine of the power status to impose its manipulation upon the public opinion. Reliant on the glossing propaganda of television, news about the Vietnam War was stripped off its aggressive essence, and displayed with a vesture of justice. Sontag is repulsive to the manipulation of information by the authority via the mass media; therefore, revealing her highly moral seriousness as a novelist. She has illuminated that novelists should never render obsolete their "prophetic and critical and even subversive task" [16], when dominant ideology acquires unprecedented opportunities for diffusion in the hegemonic discourse of the mass media. Instead of being assimilated the accomplices of the dominant value, novelists should consciously shoulder the responsibility to disclose the covered truth and recount as it is.

5. Conclusion (If I Can Choose I Prefer Not Having Any Subtitle)

Sontag was particularly sensitive about the way or manner something is said or written. She could be unusually hostile to stale notions concerning literary creation and insipid expression, almost unconditionally lent a hand in any attempt at shoring up originality in art, and stood up bravely to give protection to ingenuity in art. But after the publication of *DK* she was involved in twenty-five-year of silence in the novel creation and generated self suspicion of her caliber of being a novelist. When she reminisced the great crisis she suffered during the 1970s and the 1980s, she addressed it in this way:

I wasn't basically a writer in those years—I was a filmmaker and a political activist.... I thought: Where am I, what am I doing, what have I done? I seem to be an expatriate, but I didn't mean to become an expatriate. I don't seem to be a writer anymore, but I wanted most of all to be a writer. It doesn't make any sense to make the films. [17]

No matter it is the innovation she experimented on the writing techniques or her concentration on the morbid consciousness of the modern people, most critics seemed not to approve of the innovation she made.

Another factor that results in her silence in novel writing is the emotional stunning she received from her pilgrimage to the then newly established socialist regime—the North Vietnam. Different from the sensation she got from “the fascist aesthetics,” the aesthetics she experienced in the North Vietnam is totally “didactic”; morality of serious communist societies not only wipes out the autonomy of aesthetics, but makes it impossible to produce art in modern sense at all. The aesthetic autonomy is the core value in Sontag's whole aesthetic ideas to be defended, cherished, and indispensable for the nourishment of intelligence. What she saw and experienced during her political pilgrimage in this socialist country shattered her illusion to searching for political reform and spiritual redemption for the Capitalist countries to flee from their inherent disaster. “I came back from Hanoi considerably chastened. Life here looks both uglier and more promising.” [18] She confessed she missed the ambience of western democracy. But a decade-long residence in the 1960s, with its inexorable conversion of moral and political radicalism into “style,” has convinced her of the perils of overgeneralizing the aesthetic view of the world. A work of art should not advocate anything, but no contentual implication work of art is in fact not a real work of art. She never questioned her safeguard of “style” wrong, and yet inclined to believe “awareness of style as a problematic and isolable element in a work of art has emerged in the audience for art only at certain historical moments—as a front behind which other issues, ultimately ethical and political, are being debated” [19]. Since the late half of the 1960s, Sontag came to recognize that art is vacuous if the exploration only lingers on the level of consciousness without an involvement of structure, thematics or history. The choice of materials is never accidental or extraneous. The change of conception results in

the shift of her concern over historical narration.

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