



**Review article**  
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Introducing Trace as an Embodied

Approach to the Novel in English

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This research represents a significant theoretical contribution to the field of English novel studies, introducing the concept of “trace” as a new analytical tool for understanding the experience of reading a novel and its relationship to embodiment. Based on Paul Ricoeur’s interpretive phenomenology, the research seeks to connect interpretive theory with the phenomenology of the living body. Its importance lies in its attempt to move beyond the traditional uses of the concept of “trace,” confined to detective novels, and to extend its scope to novel studies in general, thus opening new avenues for understanding how the reader interacts with the novelistic text on both a physical and cognitive level.

#### Abstract:

This research aims primarily to introduce and develop the concept of “trace” as a versatile tool for measuring novel reading experiences and for revealing the relationship between embodiment and the novel. The researcher seeks to demonstrate that the concept of trace, when understood through Paul Ricoeur’s interpretive phenomenology, can provide a rich theoretical framework for understanding how novels shape readers’ bodily and cognitive experiences.

The research addresses a central theoretical problem: how can the concept of “trace,” as understood through Ricoeur’s interpretive phenomenology, explain the ways in which traces within novels evoke mimetic effects in readers, and how are these traces related to the phenomenology of the living body? The research places this question within the context of contemporary debates on criticism and post critique and seeks to reveal the lesser - known roots of Ricoeur’s interpretive theory in bodily phenomenology. This research employs a hermeneutical - theoretical methodology, utilizing Paul Ricoeur’s phenomenological - hermeneutical framework as a theoretical foundation for conceptual-

izing the “trace” and linking interpretation to the living body. Serving as an introductory conceptual essay that explains the theory and situates the concept of the trace within phenomenology, the research also references a collection of essays that embody this concept in practical application. Through theoretical exposition and discussion of illustrative essays, rather than presenting original empirical studies of readers, the research examines how traces within narratives evoke mimetic responses in readers. (Xia, K. 2023) - Key Findings

The research yielded several important theoretical findings: - Versatile Application: The research concludes that “trace” is a versatile concept with applications beyond detective fiction, and that it provides a key to measuring the novel reading experience in general. - The Relationship between Embodiment and Fiction: The research finds that Ricoeur’s conception of trace helps to reveal the relationship between embodiment and fiction by situating trace within the phenomenology of the living body. - Mimetic Effects: The research argues that traces within novels evoke mimetic effects in readers, shaping how readers experience literary representation. - Relevance to Contemporary Debates: The research frames these claims in relation to contemporary debates on criticism and post - criticism, indicating theoretical relevance to ongoing methodological discussions in literary studies. (Xia, K. 2023) - Critical Evaluation - Strengths - Originality of the Research

The research demonstrates clear conceptual originality by expanding the concept of “trace” beyond its specific genre uses (such as the detective novel) and situating it within Ricoeurian phenomenology, thus opening new theoretical avenues for novel studies. This conceptual expansion represents an innovative contribution to the field, linking multiple theoretical disciplines: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and reader studies.

Another innovative aspect of the research is its attempt to reveal the lesser - known roots of Ricoeur’s hermeneutical theory in embodied phenomenology. This connection

between hermeneutics and embodiment offers a new perspective that may influence how we understand the reading process as a whole, not only as a mental or cognitive process, but also as an embodied physical experience. - Methodological Quality

The abstract establishes a clear theoretical framework linking trace, embodiment, and hermeneutics, placing the work within current methodological debates on criticism and post - criticism. This clarity of theoretical framing reflects methodological rigor at the conceptual level.

The hermeneutical theoretical methodology employed is perfectly suited to the nature of the research as a conceptual introductory essay. Using Ricoeur's interpretive phenomenology as a theoretical framework provides a solid philosophical foundation for the arguments presented. Furthermore, linking the theory to a series of applied essays indicates a productive integration of theory and interpretive elucidation. - Clarity of Presentation and Results

Although the evaluation is based solely on the abstract, the abstract itself demonstrates clarity in presenting the main aims and results. The core arguments are clear: the effect as a versatile concept, its connection to embodiment, and its capacity to explain mimetic effects. This clarity facilitates understanding the theoretical contribution of the research. - Relevance to Contemporary Debates

The research astutely situates itself within the context of contemporary debates on criticism and post - criticism, thereby enhancing its relevance and connection to current concerns in literary studies. This strategic positioning makes the research relevant to ongoing methodological discussions and increases its potential impact on the field. (Xia, K. 2023) - Weaknesses - Limited Experimental Scope

The research appears to be theoretical and preliminary in nature, and therefore there is insufficient evidence of experimental or reader response data to support claims about how readers actually experience the effect in novels. This is a significant limitation, as

claims about mimetic effects and the reading experience remain at the theoretical level without empirical verification.

While theoretical frameworks are necessary and important, the absence of empirical studies limits our ability to assess whether theoretical predictions about reader experience align with actual reader experiences. This absence makes it difficult to judge the applicability of the proposed concept. - Methodological Details

The abstract does not provide specific analytical procedures or details of the text corpus used, so there is insufficient evidence to assess methodological rigor beyond conceptual arguments. For example, we do not know how the illustrative articles were selected, what criteria were used to select the novel texts used as examples, or how the theoretical concept was systematically applied to these texts.

This lack of methodological detail makes it difficult for other researchers to replicate or build upon the work systematically. It also limits our ability to assess whether the conclusions drawn are adequately supported by textual analysis. (Xia, K. 2023) - Generalization and Scope

While the research claims that the concept of the trace is versatile and extends beyond detective fiction, the abstract does not provide sufficient evidence of the applicability of this concept across different narrative genres or diverse cultural contexts. Does the concept work equally well with realistic, experimental, and fictional narratives? Can it be applied to narratives from non - Western cultures? These questions remain unanswered. - Reliance on a Single Theoretical Framework

The research relies heavily on Ricoeur's interpretive phenomenology. While this provides theoretical depth, it may also limit the interpretive scope. It might be helpful to consider how the concept of the trace interacts with other theoretical frameworks in reader studies, such as reception theory, cognitive studies, or other somatic theories. (Xia, K. 2023) - Credibility and Impact

The publication of this research in the peer - reviewed academic journal English Studies, along with the provision of a DOI, indicates the academic credibility of the research venue. English Studies is known for its high standards of peer review, which lends credibility to the published work. In terms of internal credibility, the theoretical arguments appear coherent and grounded in a solid philosophical foundation (Ricoeur's phenomenology). However, the lack of empirical data limits our ability to assess the credibility of the claims regarding the actual reader experience. - Contribution to the Field

The research's engagement with the debates surrounding embodiment and post - criticism suggests a potential impact on theoretically oriented novel studies. This research is likely to open new avenues for investigating how readers experience novels on a physical level and how literary theory can incorporate the physical dimension of reading. However, the abstract does not provide sufficient evidence to assess the empirical or long - term impact of the research. The actual impact will depend on the extent to which other researchers adopt and apply this concept in their studies and whether it leads to subsequent empirical or applied research. The research is likely to have a greater impact on theoretical and philosophical circles within literary studies, particularly among scholars interested in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and reader studies. Its impact on applied or empirical studies may be less direct unless empirical methodologies are developed to test the proposed concepts. (Xia, K. 2023) - Conclusion

Kai Xia's Introducing Trace as an Embodied Approach to the Novel in English is a significant theoretical contribution to the field of English novel studies. It presents an innovative and theoretically sophisticated concept that connects interpretation, embodiment, and the novelistic experience in a novel way. Its conceptual originality, theoretical clarity, and relevance to contemporary debates make it a valuable contribution to the field. However, limitations related to the empirical scope and methodological details restrict our ability to assess the practical validity and actual impact of the proposed con-

cept. The research serves well as a theoretical starting point that needs to be followed up with empirical and applied studies to reach its full potential. Overall, this research can be considered important for scholars interested in literary theory, phenomenology, and reader studies, but it requires further development at the empirical and applied levels to achieve a broader impact in the field. Based on the identified strengths and weaknesses, several directions for future research can be suggested: - Empirical reader response studies: Conducting empirical studies that test how actual readers experience effects in novels and whether these experiences align with theoretical predictions about emulation and personification effects. Methodologies such as in - depth interviews, think - aloud protocols, or even eye - tracking techniques can be used to understand how readers interact with textual effects. - Comparative cross - genre studies: Applying the concept of effect across different narrative genres (realism, experimental, fiction, historical, etc. ) to assess its versatility and applicability. This will help determine whether the concept works equally effectively across different genres or whether it needs genre - specific modifications. - Cross - cultural studies: Exploring how the concept of effect functions in different cultural and linguistic contexts. Can this concept, rooted in Western phenomenology, be applied to novels from non - Western cultures? And how might readers from different cultural backgrounds have different experiences? - Developing analytical methodologies: Developing specific and systematic analytical methodologies for identifying and analyzing effects in narrative texts. This will help make the concept more applicable and reproducible to other researchers. - Integration with other theoretical frameworks: Explore how the concept of the trace interacts with other theoretical frameworks in reader studies, such as reception theory, cognitive studies, or effect theory. This integration may enrich the concept and broaden its scope of application. - Deeper philological and theoretical work: Conduct deeper philological or theoretical work that connects Ricoeurian phenomenology with contemporary narratology. This may help build bridges

between different theoretical traditions and foster dialogue between phenomenological and structuralism/post - structuralism approaches in narrative studies.

In conclusion, Kai Xia's research represents an important step toward a deeper understanding of the physical and embodied dimension of the novel reading experience. By introducing the concept of the "trace" as an analytical tool rooted in interpretive phenomenology, the research opens new avenues for research in novel studies and reader studies. However, realizing the full potential of this concept requires further research efforts at both the empirical and applied levels. Researchers interested in this field are encouraged to build upon this solid theoretical foundation through empirical and comparative studies that test and expand upon the proposed concept. From a neutral academic perspective, this research is a valuable addition to the theoretical literature in novel studies and deserves the attention and further development of the research community.

Reference - Xia, K. (2023). Introducing Trace as an Embodied Approach to the Novel in English. *English Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2023.2196903>.

