I will be rethinking the Travel paper, both in terms of an event that stimulated a rethink and some later work that helped me understand this event. The original paper offers a very negative view of travel. In doing so, it identifies as travel’s core phenomenon or what we call its usage, ‘denaturalization.’ It is said not belonging to the place (which of course characterizes the tourist) produces a ‘denaturalization of one’s interactions.’ This state is contrasted with more normal, everyday, interactions at work, home, in friendship, etc. which have a naturalized character.

It is said that being in this denaturalized state is problematic because it is painful. Think for example of the pain of not even knowing how to get on a bus. We say not only the tourist experiences this pain. The stranger does too. The difference is that the tourist ‘happily chooses this mode’ and does not even wish to get over it.

The paper then goes on to wonder why anyone would ever willingly choose such a painful state. The answer the paper offers is that there is at least one drawback to one’s everyday, normal interactions, an inevitable feature of where one does belong and so is neither tourist nor stranger. When we are at home, ‘things are absorbed into an analytic-a tradition- and when this happens the thing is no longer a fresh object. Travel offers a kind of solution to this problem by letting one arrive at the entirely new but we say this is not a good solution. We say it is merely a temporary escape and say it is not what could be desirable-change-but just sheer movement. What is recommended instead is staying and suffering this pain of non-freshness as an inevitable feature of belonging somewhere, i.e. being committed.

The paper, then, does not deny that there is suffering associated with belonging, it is the suffering of loss of freshness, but we say that it is better to to face this-suffer it-endure it-rather than merely escape it via temporary denaturalization.

I have an example of belonging which does fit with what we say about it in the paper. I was a dinner guest at Peter and his wife Pat’s house and I happened to ask: ‘Who is the better writer, Scott Fitzgerald or Ernest Hemingway’. Pat said: ‘Scott Fitzgerald’. Instead of giving his own answer, Peter said: ‘Of course Pat would think that.’

Clearly it seemed natural to him that she would think that. The naturalness is a feature of them living and so, as it were, belonging together. Certainly, as the Travel paper would expect, there is a loss of freshness here. And we can even say that there is an element of him suffering the way she is, meaning the kind of person who would think this way.

So we have an example of the denaturalized state. The paper suggests that while travel is an option and while it would produce something different, namely denaturalization, it is not an advisable option because it is merely temporary relief.

A first disconcerting fact, both from the perspective of their marriage and from the perspective of the paper is that Peter made it clear that he did not consider what I just witnessed all that good. Also, Peter revealed that, in an attempt to see if he and Pat could get along better they were going on holiday to Venice. I felt like saying ‘don’t go. It will merely be an escape. Stay and suffer.’

But what actually happened is that it is no exaggeration to say he came back announcing that his marriage had been saved. As happy as I was for Peter and Pat I was also quite worried about the implications for the Travel paper. Hence the need to rethink the paper.
I have a bit of usage from their trip that we can perhaps use to launch a revised version of the possibilities of travel. Looking around him in Venice, Peter asked Pat: ‘Why does everything look so clear?’ Pat replied: ‘Because there is no dust.’

First thing to note is that, as the Travel paper would predict, we get, in Peter’s remark, an example of denaturalization, although not a painful one. No long term natives are likely to be remarking on the clarity of view in Venice any more than long term Scots are likely to notice how green the grass is here. So thus far there is nothing the original paper would not expect. But now consider Pat’s remark. Consider, in particular, both the similarities to and the differences from their Toronto interchange. This time I do not think Peter knew what Pat would say. And following on from this, certainly this time the remark had a freshness for him. But also there is a compelling question that arises. The remark, we just said, had a freshness for him. Is it that there is a new Pat or is it that the same old Pat is being experienced in a new way?

Although we cannot yet understand the full significance of it, it is worth noting that what he said when he came back provides an answer to this question. He said that he had been thinking about her in the wrong way and he also said that the wrong way was as endurance. If he had been thinking about her in the wrong way, it is not she that had changed.

The wrong way, endurance, clearly depicts for him, the relationship gone wrong. But if enduring it depicts when a relationship has gone wrong, then the Travel paper’s idea that this state is inevitable for one’s long term relationships must also be wrong. Furthermore, as the development away from enduring that seemed to put the relationship on a better footing was associated in some way with denaturalizing, travel and its process of denaturalizing must be more potentially fruitful than the paper made out.

The paper did not have much to say about the nature of the interactions that we form when are at home except that they inevitably cease to be fresh and so perhaps relationships or at least some of them need to be better understood than we understood them at the time of the original paper.

Pat and Peter’s relationship can be called an intimate one. We will use a paper Peter wrote much later, Intimacy, to gain a revised understanding both of the state they were in before their trip and how the trip could have changed things.

According to the paper, Intimacy seems paradoxical because it has two different meanings which appear to contradict each other. On the one hand the intimate is defined as the innermost and yet to intimate is defined as to make known. As we usually think of the innermost as what is way inside—not on the exterior—it is the idea that this can be known that seems paradoxical.

Peter’s immediate solution to the paradox is to suggest that intimacy involves a distinct kind of discourse which accomplishes what is impossible with normal discourse. Its discourse does not proceed by representing-re-presenting—as in narrating. Instead, as the word implies, intimates practice and in a way are defined by the form of discourse called intimating. This is related to aesthetic communication-indicating but not in so many words—as do poems, paintings, and pantomime. In this form of communication instead of narrating an external event, there is a kind of radiating from a center. In the case of intimacy, this center would be the person’s innermost. He finds a quote from Arendt
which talks to this phenomenon. She suggests that you can’t represent someone’s soul by normal talk but it is displayed by their gestures.

Whether or not intimacy has always existed, arguably it has never been theorized. For example, while it is certainly related to ideas discussed by Plato, friendship, love, eros, you do not in him get these phenomena formulated as cases of intimacy, exposing and thereby knowing someone’s or each other’s innermost. We can say that intimacy offers a modern take on eros. Attraction is certainly still there as in Plato’s theorizing of love but in intimacy the attraction takes the form of a mutual desire to disclose, to expose and so to know each other’s innermost.

He offers a formulation of this kind of exposure—the intimate moment and in a good relationship there would be many—as the other being expressed and the expression feeling immediate in the sense that it feels nothing mediates between you and her innermost when the intimacy is expressed, e.g. by a wink or a look. On the other hand, in narrative, whatever is represented is not immediately there. Exposure captures this immediacy of expression happening.

What can help us further understand this mode of communication is where, in another section of the paper, he says quite a bit more about the intimating process. He says intimating is like how certain paintings do exposing in instances the figure of their substantive nature, a figure that extends beyond the particulars of immediate content. His example is Picasso’s Guernica. The particulars are the painting we have before us. But what is exposed by these particulars is civil war. Certainly this is more than is literally before us. And yet we do feel an immediate expression of civil war. His idea is that intimacy involves this sort of communicating. In its case, the particular could be a wink or a look and what is exposed in the person’s innermost being.

Now what makes this further elaboration of what this form of communication is like particularly relevant for our purposes is that he goes on to say that this artistic process is a fragile one and also that it has a distinctive form when it goes wrong. He has an example of it going wrong. He says Munch’s The Scream also has a figure that can be derived from its particulars, namely anxiety, but, alas, it no longer communicates anxiety in the immediate and expressive way the Picasso still communicates civil war. In art, we experience the failure of Munch’s painting by giving it the status of a cliche.

He also depicts the process by which this aesthetic failure occurs. The kind of experience that Guernica supplies is when there is a space or journey for us between the object—the signifier and what is signified. We engage with the object and finally come to a signified, the point where we understand it, what it signifies, in this case civil war. It may not take long in time for there to be this space for our journey but there is definitely a feeling of a journey from one to the other. In cliche, this aesthetic journey from signifier to signified no longer happens, the signifier has virtually collapsed into the signified. Menke calls this when understanding has become automatic.

Now what begins to relate this to our material is Peter’s next point, that the space between signifier and signified could also recede in a relationship. We feel this as the intimacy turning shallow or dull and while we don’t describe this as a cliche, we do depict it as something analogous, it all becoming too routine.

With this analysis in mind we can return to our usage. Concerning the before the trip interaction, it seems right that in this case the space between the signifier (Pat’s opinion)
and the signified (part of Pat’s innermost being as a stylish, Fitzgerald rather than Hemingway type) is not very great. The particular does not seem to Peter to require much of a journey before he gets to what it signifies to him. And the lack of much of a space does result in him finding the relationship routine and Pat rather dull. We can also say that it makes sense that if this is how he experiences her, he would think the best he can do is to endure her. And finally, what returns us to a big problem with the original travel paper is that this state corresponds to what that paper advocated, i.e., naturalization.

However, we can now say that whereas the travel paper treated this as an inevitable feature of one’s committed-belonging relationships, in the light of the later paper, if this is an intimate relationships, this state is not inevitable, it is only when the intimate process is failing. It is not what intimacy at its best is like.

Now turning to the second exchange, it does seem that Peter is having a different sort of experience of Pat. Yet it is not quite right to say that what has changed is Pat. She is still showing herself as interested in and knowledgeable about concerns connected to the style of things. Recognizably the same person would prefer Fitzgerald to Hemingway and be able to account for the look of objects in Venice.

But if Pat has not changed, what can account for why Peter is having a different experience of her? What seems right is that this time there is not the disappearance of a space between what she says—the particular—the signifier—and what it exposes about her—the signified—the innermost. This time, then, Peter has a journey from one to the other. That there is a space and so a journey is made possible by the fact that, even though what she says is certainly characteristic of her, this time it is not a remark that he could have put in her mouth in advance. As such, it enabled him to experience her in a new way. This resonates with something else Peter says about great art. It can continue to be experienced in new ways because it manages ‘an inexhaustibility of sense.’ What Pat is has also become inexhaustible.

We can put it that it is not just Venice that has been denaturalized. Pat has been too and in her case the denaturalization is not just an escape. It can have a more lasting effect, namely enabling Peter to realize that he does not need merely to endure the relationship because the intimating process, the journey from signifier to signified has not permanently ended.

The remaining question is how travel can, if not guarantee, at least facilitate this happening. Firstly, as indicated by the fact that they could not have had this conversation which after all is stimulated by a fact about Venice, back in Toronto, it is the case that a new environment can stimulate new signifiers, in this case a question by Peter and an answer from Pat, having to incorporate these new signifiers into one’s sense of the person could make a journey before one arrives at their innermost again necessary. In this respect, incidentally, intimates have an advantage over even the greatest art since the latter must remain inexhaustible without being able to add material to what is already there. Second, it may be that even without making novel remarks, by a process of osmosis, being in a foreign place does not just denaturize that place but also the familiar companion one brings to it. Third, there is a point developed neither in the original travel paper nor in Peter’s work on intimacy. Arendt has suggested that it is impossible to expose oneself if all one is dealing with are necessities. In that travel does free one from dealing with necessities, that suggests another reason why it could facilitate the kind of communication that, as we have seen, intimacy needs. It may not be impossible but it is
much less likely for the intimating process necessary to keep the relationship fresh to occur when all a couple are doing together are things like washing the dishes.