the shifting status of these danger-situations with respect to the intrapsychic versus interpersonal, or internal versus external, dichotomy. The initial danger-situation—helplessness in the face of overwhelming instinctual tension—is wholly internal. When the infant perceives that an external object can alleviate such traumatized states, the new danger-situation that consequently develops is an interpersonal one—loss of the object. This, in turn, evolves further into a more refined interpersonal danger—loss of the object’s love. The status of castration appears to be an interpersonal danger, in Freudian theory the fear of castration is often seen as resulting from projection of the boy’s own inner hostile wishes to castrate the Oedipal father. Finally, with the dread of the superego, the danger-situation comes full circle and is once again wholly internal.

What are we to make of this ambiguous and unstable status of the danger-situation with respect to internality versus externality? I contend that this ambiguity and instability derive from Freud’s unacknowledged adherence to assumptions inherited from Cartesian philosophy. Descartes's (1641/1989) metaphysics divided the finite world into 2 distinct basic substances—res cogitans and res extensa, thinking substances (minds) and extended substances (bodies and other material things). This metaphysical dualism spawned a number of closely interrelated bifurcations that contributed to the evolution of the scientific world view and that came to pervade both Western folk psychology and academic psychology, including psychoanalytic theory (Stolorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2002)—mind versus body, cognition versus affect, reason versus desire, and, most important for my purposes here, subject versus object, or internal versus external. Within the perspective of Cartesian dualism, every situation—including danger-situations—must be indexed as either internal or external.

Within philosophy, perhaps the most important challenge to such an assumption, and to the subject-object bifurcation generally, was mounted by Heidegger (1927/1962). Against Descartes's bare, worldless subject isolated from a brute (unorganized), subject-less world, for Heidegger the being of human life was primordially engaged and contextually embedded, a “being-in-the-world.” In Heidegger’s vision, human being is saturated with the world in which it dwells, just as the inhabited world is drenched in human meanings and purposes. Being-in and world are indissoluble components of a larger whole or system.

In Heidegger’s philosophy, a situation is a concrete instantiation of the general existential mode of being-in-the-world. Thus, in place of a brute situation, we should speak instead of a being-in-a-situation (Dreyfus, 1991). Similarly, from a Heideggerian perspective, Freud’s concept of danger-situation becomes a being-in-danger, wherein being-in and danger are grasped as inseparable dimensions of the larger unity. In a psychoanalysis, the patient’s experience of endangerment is recognized as an emergent property of the larger patient-analyst system.
This recognition holds important implications for an intersubjective-systems approach to the analysis of resistance, or of what my collaborators and I (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992) have termed "the repetitive/conflictual/resistive dimension of transference," in which the patient fears, expects, or experiences a recurrence with the analyst of early developmental trauma. First and foremost, as Winnicott (1951/1975) aptly enjoined with regard to transitional phenomena, the experience of endangerment must remain "unchallenged in respect to its belonging to inner or external…reality" (p. 242). The question of whether the danger is internal or external is simply "not to be formulated" (p. 240), because in a post-Cartesian philosophical world, the question itself is nonsensical.

What this means practically for the analysis of resistance is that the larger intersubjective system in which the patient's experience of endangerment takes form must be investigated and illuminated. Analytic attention must be paid both to those activities of the analyst (e.g., malattuned interpretations, expressions of emotion, silences, endings of sessions, etc.) that are lending themselves to the patient's anticipation of impending retraumatization, and to the meanings according to which these activities are being assimilated by the patient (the patient's particular mode of being-in). Such an approach encourages analysts, as Gill (1982) recommended, to seek understanding of how the patient's transference experiences of endangerment make sense (Orange, 1995), rather than of how they are distortions of a reality "known" by the analyst. In my clinical experience, a search for sense-in-context is much more facilitative of the psychoanalytic process that a decontextualized quest for distortion. In this light, Freud's concept of danger-situation, seen through a post-Cartesian, Heideggerian lens, provides a nice bridge to an intersubjective-systems perspective on the analysis of resistance.

References