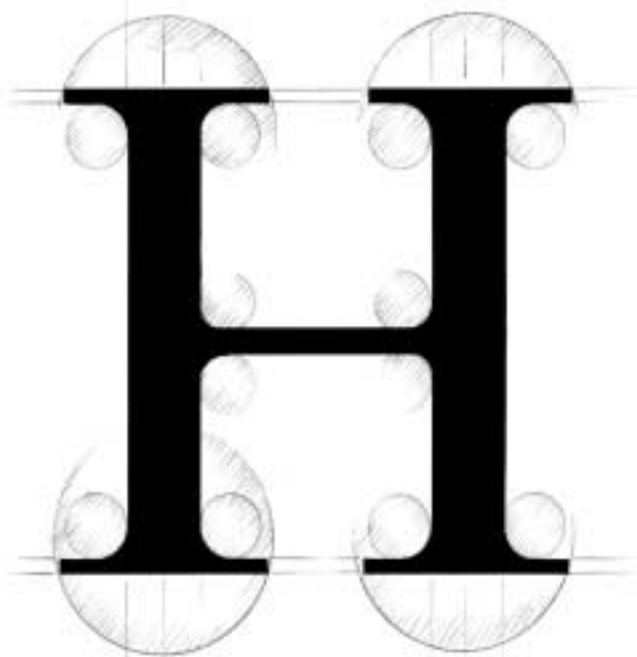



Body Language

BY THOMAS MYERS

**An excursion
through the
alphabet in
somatic terms**



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BOWMAN



Body Language is a column where we explore the alphabet in terms of the body and bodywork. For each letter, we look at the letter's origin, introduce a bodywork approach that

begins with the letter and explore one clinical issue suggested by the letter. In this issue we explore the letter H, profile Joseph Heller, and look at what the hologram can tell us about holistic therapies.

We have reached the eighth letter, H, known as *het* from the original proto-Sinaitic alphabet nearly 4,000 years ago and right up through the current Hebrew. Although its sound remains the same, both the meaning and shape have changed. Let's explore.

Its original form in the earliest transliterations from the Egyptian hieroglyphs was a representation of a lotus flower, but the reason or meaning for this *het* is unknown.

Interestingly, the lotus flower, depending on where you look, appears at both the top and the bottom of the spiritual scale. The enlightenment of the Buddha, the opening of his crown chakra, is often depicted as a thousand-petaled lotus flower opening from the top of his head. This parallels the glowing halo often found above the heads of the enlightened in the Western artistic tradition. On the lower end,

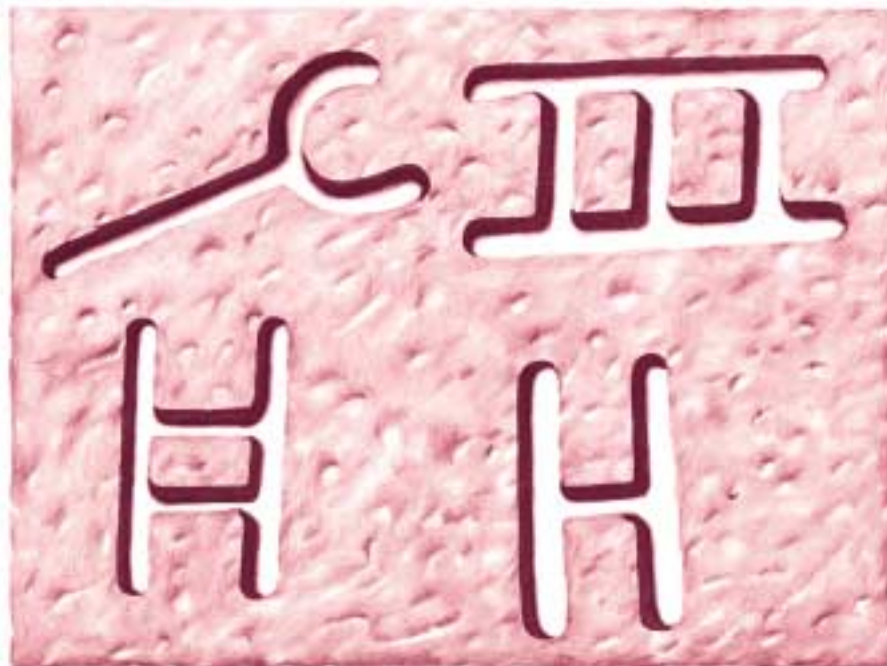
"lotus-eaters" is a derogatory term for those lost in the idle pleasures of psychotropic narcotics. One of the first stops for Odysseus, on his long journey home from the sack of Troy, was to the island of the lotus-eaters. Here a number of his men fell prey to the delightful but fruitless visions that follow the eating of the lotus, and the rest of the crew had to drag them away from their addiction back to the boat. We do not know whether either of these meanings, or some other, attached themselves to *het* at this time.

By 1300 B.C.E. (Before the Christian Era) in the proto-Canaanite alphabet, the form of *het* that led to the letter H appears as a pictogram with a clear and rich meaning. *Het*, or H, means enclosure, barrier or wall. This form is a simple depiction of a fence; a fence undoubtedly ►

designed to keep the alpha-ox (the primal, animating energy of the letter A) from escaping. While B, or *beta*, also symbolized an enclosure, *beta* represents the protecting wall of a house. *Het* implies much more of a barrier, an obstacle to be overcome, an implication that still resides in the current Hebrew meaning ascribed to *het*: sin. Sin is an embarrassingly uncomfortable concept in our relativistic age, where everyone can shift blame—onto their parents, their education, their ex and their environment—and can therefore imagine that they are free from the judgement-laden burden of sin.

But the concept imbedded in the original word is certainly a fascinating clue: Sin is a fence that keeps us walled off from God, and sin is also a fence we use to protect us from the reality of the outside world. In either case, the cure for sin is the same: atonement, which breaks down to a very Buddhist “at-one-ment”—the breaking down of the fence, the walls of the cyst that holds us away from the rest of creation.

But H is not done with us yet: *Het* changes form, shifting 90 degrees from its original position (this happens frequently in alphabetical history, as we saw in A, C, D and E). In subsequent alphabets, H turned from a fence to a ladder! Our current form, from the Greek *eta*, shows the ladder with one rung. Reminiscent of Jacob’s ladder into heaven, H reminds us that the fences that wall us off need to be transformed into ladders that lead us back to connection.



The letter H, or *het*, started out (from left) as a lotus flower, but soon had a standard form as a fence. The fence turned 90 degrees to form a ladder that was depicted in a variety of ways, which survived into Greek with one rung.

This is an interesting image, for skillfully applied somatic therapy can turn the client’s fences—limitations, or obstacles—into ladders of access to new feelings and states of learning.

One of the popular ways of turning such limiting myofascial fences into transformative movement ladders is Hellerwork, initiated by Joseph Heller, our body-work pioneer for the letter H. Heller was born in Poland and moved to the United States when he was 16. He became an aerospace engineer with the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, while also pursuing an exploration of what was then called the Human Potential Movement. His interest in human development led him to workshops with Virginia Satir, Buckminster Fuller and John Lilly, among others. Along the way he

met Ida Rolf and got the body-work bug, and he has spent the past 30 years exploring, explaining and elaborating on his vision of her work.

Heller became a Rolfer in 1972 and was the first president of the Rolf Institute, beginning in 1975. He left the Institute in 1978 to form Hellerwork®. Although Hellerwork follows a structural-integration program similar to the one put forth by the Rolf Institute, The Guild for Structural Integration and a number of other heirs of Ida Rolf, Hellerwork includes several singular innovations. Heller wanted to add more movement repatterning (a la Judith Aston, with whom he studied while at the Institute); and psychological awareness, to avoid having the client drop back into his or her habitual ways of being and moving.



Photos courtesy of Joseph Heller

Joseph Heller, founder of Hellerwork and author of *Bodywise*.

I was interested in Heller's take on things because I teach classes to structural-integration practitioners fairly often, and of the various groups and schools that lay claim to Rolf's mantle, I find the Hellerwork practitioners to be consistently better-prepared than the average practitioner for the totality of challenges this work has to offer.¹

When I spoke to Heller and asked him, in his opinion, what made Hellerwork unique, he said that the emphasis in his school is on the whole person. "We work on people, not just with the structure,

nor just with the mechanics," he said. "Without the consciousness of the client, the results are more temporary." Hellerwork recognizes the intimacy of the somatic-integration process, the dialogue between the body and the psyche in emotional-process issues.

"But how do you teach that?" I asked him.

"My intention is to give the students an experience of unconditional love," he said.

Interesting answer. If you give the student an experience of Jesus-like, child-like, unconditional love, without judgement, ►

comparison or any kind of evaluation, Heller is implying, they will be better able to listen, to attend to the inner psychic journey that accompanies the structural change of the myofascial release involved in structural integration. Heller sees the training as a very personal process, as much or more than learning the manual

techniques. Heller also said he includes a lot of work on chakra energies and has been influenced by extensive work with the psychic explorer Brugh Joy.

In my experience, each school of structural integration would claim that it is working with the whole person, but it is also true that each school lays different

emphasis on the spiritual, emotional and technical aspects of the work. It's a marvelous testament to the universality of Rolf's conception that it can be successfully developed in any of a number of directions. She herself admitted that more work needed to be done with movement re-patterning—that's why she sent Aston off in that direction. As far as psychology goes, Rolf's infamous quote is: "There is no psychology, there is only physiology—get good physiology and you'll get good psychology." She later softened this to: "The body may not be all there is, but at least I can get my hands on it." My own experience with Ida Rolf was that she was a consummate observer, if not practitioner, of the psychophysiological process.

In his book, *Bodywise*, still an excellent introduction to the bodywork field 15 years after its publication, Heller lays out a remarkably wide arc of the relevance and possibilities involved in any somatic work in general and structural bodywork in particular. The second part of the book outlines the structure of the Hellerwork series. (It also tries to shoehorn the structural integration sessions into psychological sneakers that are way too tight, in my humble opinion. Not everybody's control and surrender issues reside in the pelvic floor.) The first half of the book, however, is an excellent survey of the issues at hand for any method within the bodywork field. Heller talks about the body as pattern and discusses how the integrity of that pattern can be interrupted. He reviews the vary-

ing philosophies of the body in simple language and introduces the major traditions in hands-on-healing, seeking an inclusive context for Hellerwork. In the process he has created a brief and compelling statement for any hands-on healer to read or pass on to clients.

One of the images Heller uses in his book, one I had not thought about for some time but that deserves resurrection, is the image of the body as a hologram. So our third exploration is of the hologram, and what it can tell us about holistic therapies.

“Holo” means “whole” and appears in holistic and hologram, and in such therapeutic brands as Holotropic (moving toward wholeness) Breathwork and Holographic (whole picture) Repatterning.

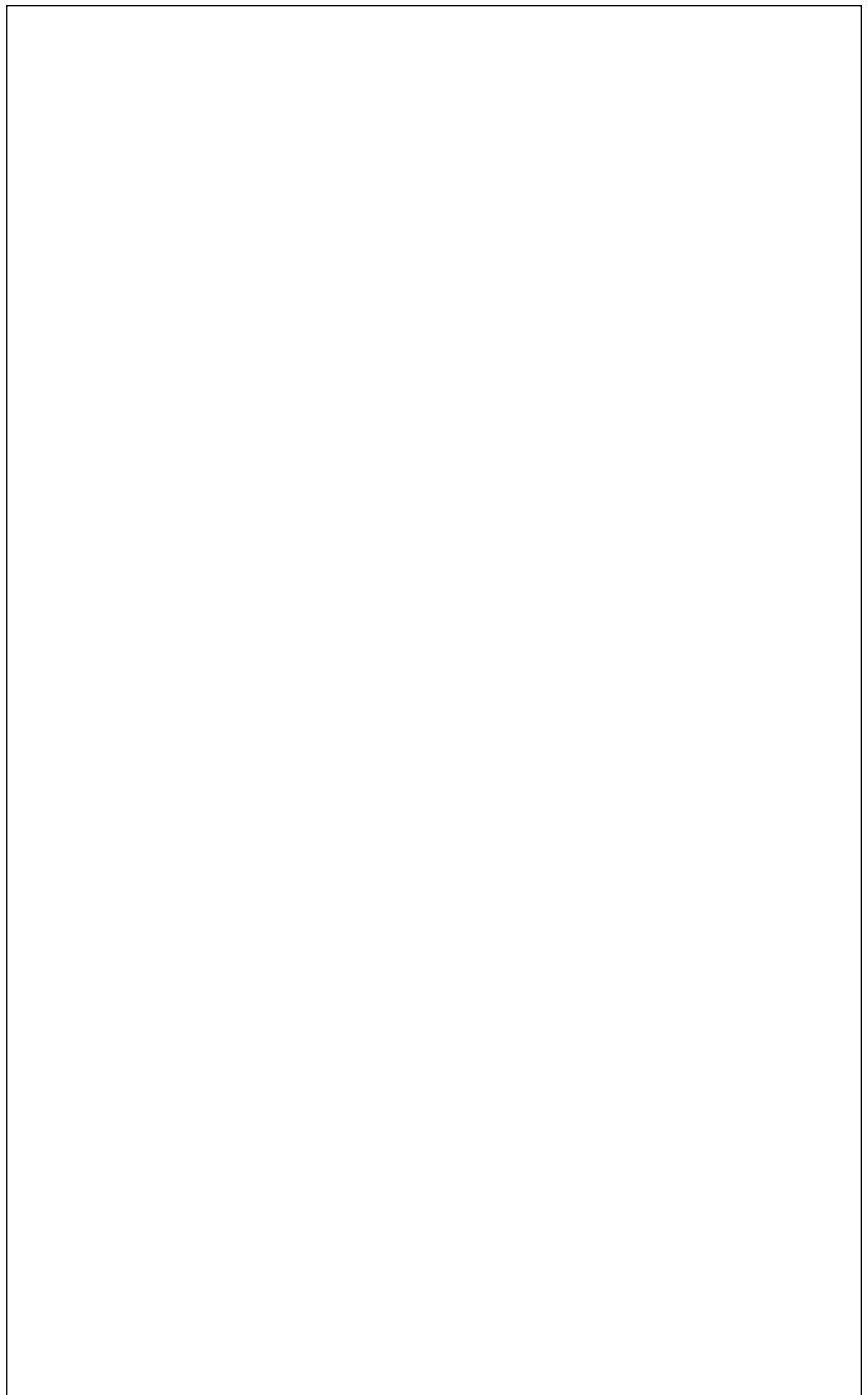
A hologram is a weird kind of photograph, but the image is useful, so let’s review: A regular camera bends and focuses the light hitting the lens into an image in much the same way our eye does. A hologram works in a totally different, intriguing way. A hologram depends on laser light, in which all of the light waves are made to march in synchronous rows, like soldiers on parade. A laser beam is split off prismatically so that part of the original beam goes straight to the photographic plate, where the synchronized light waves lay down a regular pattern. This is the reference beam.

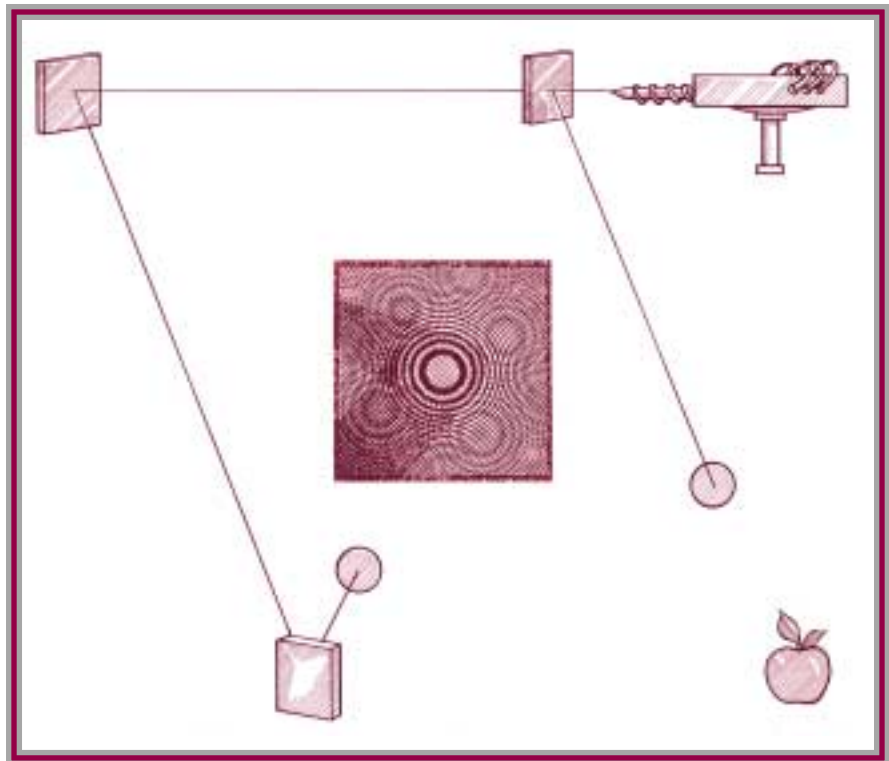
The rest of the beam is directed at an object— let’s say, an apple. The laser light hits the apple and bounces off onto the photographic plate. Notice that this part of the light is not put

through a lens between the apple and film, it just bounces off the apple and hits the plate willy-nilly, so any given point on the film is getting bits of bounced laser light from every part of the apple visible from that spot on the film. What gets laid down on the film is not an image of the apple, but an interference pattern

between the regular ripples laid down by the reference beam and the willy-nilly ripples that bounced off the apple.

To get a simple image, we will put three small boys at three points around the shore of a small lake. We will have them each take a stick and reach over and tap the surface of the ▶





A hologram is produced when laser light is split into two beams. A reference beam is bounced onto the photographic plate directly, while the other part hits the object and bounces onto the plate. The two beams interact to produce an interference pattern that is registered on the film. Shine a laser light through the resulting film, and the image of the original object will appear.

water with a regular beat like a metronome. The ripples would spread out regularly from each boy's stick in a circle, and the waves would begin to overlap in the middle. Soon there would be a whole standing pattern of waves as the three sets overlapped and interacted, adding to and canceling each other out by turns. If you could, by magic, suddenly freeze the pond in the midst of this, the ice would show a momentary version of this repetitive wave pattern. Interestingly, shine a laser light through the huge sheet of ice, and the three points where the

boys' sticks were would appear. The pattern of interacting waves contains the information of the source of the waves, even though the image itself bears no resemblance to the source.²

A hologram is exactly like the large bit of frozen waves—it records the waves' patterns between the regular reference beam and the light bouncing off the apple—and what is on the plate is simply an endless repetition of the interference patterns.³

If you understand this, you understand that odd fact about holograms: Cut up the film and shine a laser light through any of

Although every piece
of the hologram is
going to give us a
rendition of the whole
original image, the
smaller the piece
of film, the smaller
and fuzzier that image
is going to be.

the pieces, and each piece would show you the entire original image—the whole apple—but the image would be smaller and less detailed. The smaller the piece, the fewer repetitions of the wave interference pattern are there to draw on to create the image.

This idea from holography—that the information to create the whole is somehow contained in each piece—has been applied to memory and consciousness formation in the brain (by Karl Pribram), and is applied by Heller to the body—seeing that each part of the body reflects the whole. But we should notice that, although every piece of the hologram is going to give us a rendition of the whole original image, the smaller the piece of film, the smaller and fuzzier that image is going to be.

This brings us to the nature of holistic therapies and therapists. The word holistic distinguishes whatever noun it is modifying from modern science reductionistic applications (where only the part in question is examined—the mechanistic, divide-and-conquer attitude that have brought us so much freedom from disease and also so much alienation). ►

This seems to imply that holistic therapies would address the person at every level; for instance, nutritionally, homeopathically, psychologically, structurally, energetically, chemically and functionally. There have been two attempts at this kind of thing that I have observed in the integrative medicine movement: putting all

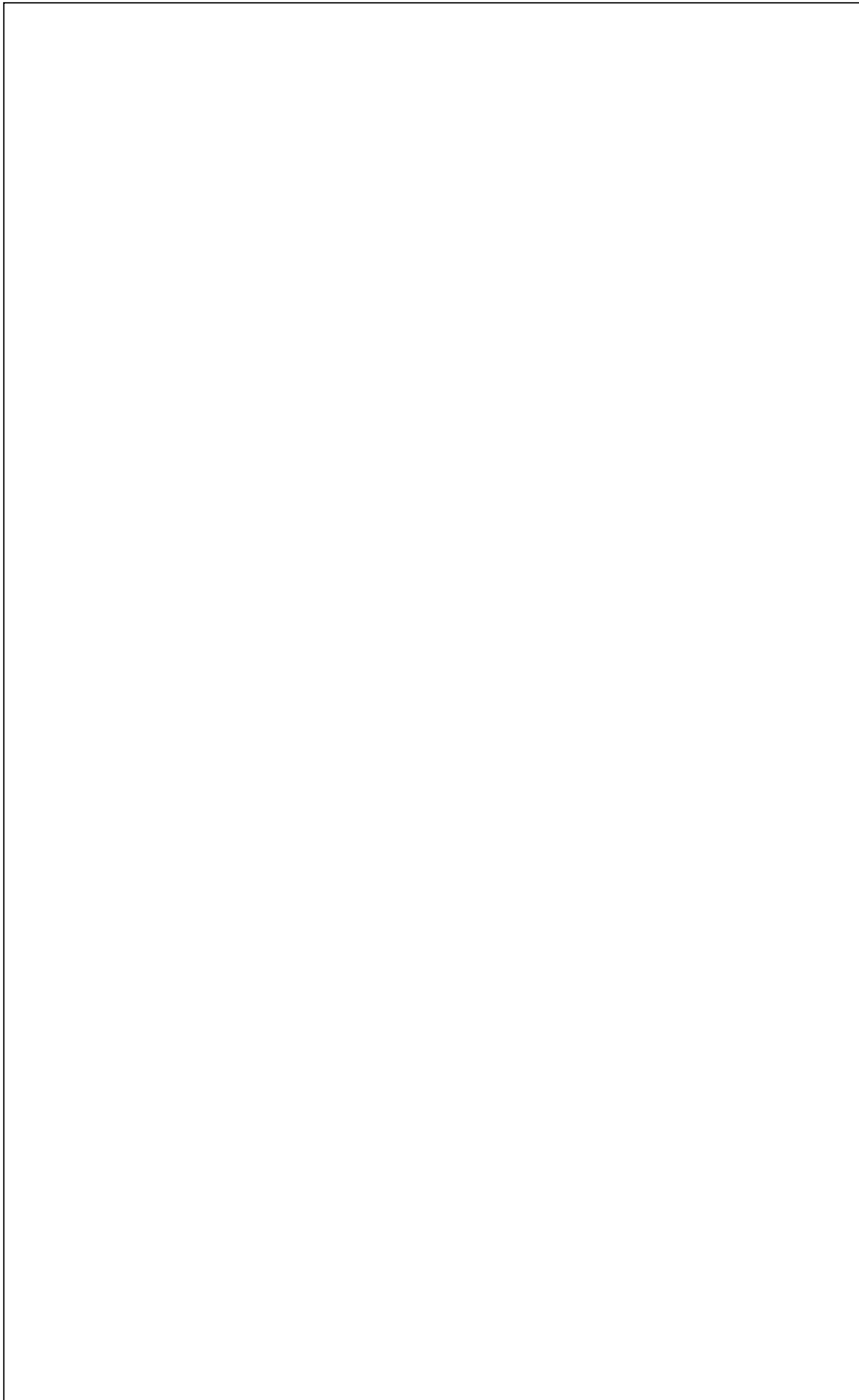
these points of view into one clinic; and putting all these points of view into one practitioner.

Although I remain open to hearing about successes, the multidisciplinary clinic model has had a lot of problems, at least the ones I have heard about. Despite their brave and well-meaning attempts, there

have been the inevitable ego problems among practitioners, communication difficulties among the various points-of-view represented and fundamental cost problems in engaging so many practitioners around one person's problem. It's a very capital-and-labor-intensive approach to healing.

If holistic clinics have had difficulties, I take an even dimmer view of the holistic practitioner who tries to embody the entire gamut of whole-body approaches. You would think that someone who had trained in and understood acupuncture, naturopathy, osteopathy and psychotherapy would be at a great advantage over the person who had studied only acupuncture. Certain people come to mind, such as Leon Chaitow, N.D., and David Peters, M.D., in England, who have trod this path ever so successfully, true polymaths in the healing field. But so many others of my acquaintances who so proudly list off their qualifications leave me cold, and certainly wouldn't get my business, because their wide-ranging studies have left them with great breadth, but little depth in any one discipline. When you combine all these different disciplines together, it is a lot easier to get dishwater than it is to get soup.

The trick, I believe, and the lesson of the holographic metaphor, is to approach your client holistically, whatever your chosen art. Whatever you practice, it contains the whole within it. You could be a specialist in the little fingernail and still attend to the whole person, still



practice holistically. Let the art deepen to include your entire observation of the person, while your intervention stays within your honed skill set. In this way, Heller can rightfully claim that his structural approach is holistic, even though it says nothing about nutrition. I remind my students often that they can always refer to another health-care professional. You don't have to be expert in all fields; you only have to have expertise in the ability to attend to your client so you can feel what they need. The holism of this attention will always keep your practice full. M

Footnotes

1. Admittedly, my sample size is very small, so don't go to the bank with this observation. When choosing a practitioner to work with, or a school to be taught by—or a dance partner, for that matter—chemistry is the most reliable guide. Each structural integration school has its own chemistry, suited to different learning styles and practice emphasis.
2. The master navigators of the Pacific Islanders, who could read where islands were over the horizon by looking at the waves as they passed the canoe, utilized an interesting application of this kind of holographic pattern. By using the patterns in the waves, they could steer reliably to these remote islands.
3. The three-dimensionality of holograms is due to this fact: Lean to the left and you see the pattern of light that was bouncing off the left side of the apple. Lean to the right and you see the light from the right side of the apple. This enables you to “see around corners” even though the pattern is recorded on a flat sheet of film.

Thomas Myers studied directly with Ida Rolf, Ph.D., and Moshe Feldenkrais Ph.D., and has practiced integrative bodywork for more than 25 years in a variety of cultural and clinical settings. He directs Kinesis Seminars, Inc., which develops and runs international training courses for manual and movement therapists. Myers served as a founding member

of the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork and as chair of the anatomy faculty at the Rolf Institute. His articles have appeared in numerous magazines and journals, and he is the author of Anatomy Trains—Myofascial Meridians for Manual and Movement Therapists, published in 2001 by Churchill Livingstone.