

Dis-integration

2002 | Frame capture/reproduction from adaptation of Schnitzler's *Liebelei*



The photograph is one of the coincidences of material and history that probably happen more often than we notice. In 2001 I was given a number of rolls of old film which had been subjected to fire damage and subsequent water damage. Much of the film was glued together as a result and it continued to deteriorate further at a rapid rate. I managed to determine that it was a copy of an adaptation of Schnitzler's *Liebelei*, the title frames disintegrating in my hands. I was able to save a few frames of a woman's face, discoloured and in the process of dissolution. The image here is one of them. A few weeks later the material was almost totally decomposed and had to be disposed of.

Further research proved that the now deceased film was the 1927 silent production of Schnitzler's *Liebelei* produced by Jacob and Luise Fleck—the latter an Austrian film director, possibly only the second woman director in the world—with the woman in the photo, Evelyn Holt, playing the role of Christine, the girl from the suburbs who falls in love with a man subsequently killed in a duel. Her world crumbles.

History, in the form of the Nazi takeover of Germany and Austria, now takes on a major role. Adolf Hitler called Schnitzler's work "Jewish filth" and it featured in a number of Goebbels' book burning propaganda events. Jacob and Luise Fleck fled to Shanghai for the duration of the war and Evelyn Holt, being half Jewish, was effectively forced out of picture making. After she married publisher Felix Guggenheim the couple fled to Switzerland and then, via England, to the Pacific coast of the USA where they settled. She never took up acting again and died in 2001 Los Angeles.