In Orson Welles’s film of The Trial, Joseph K’s nightmare unfolds to the strains of Albinoni’s Adagio. It’s as if the soundtrack is already in mourning for K. The fable of the man who waits all his life at the gate seeking access to the law, which Kafka locates in the middle of his novel, serves Welles as prologue. It contributes to a sense that everything we’re about to see might already have been done.

Welles once confided, “I’ve had recurring nightmares of guilt all my life” and said that The Trial was “the most autobiographical film I’ve ever made”. Though Welles appears in the film, Anthony Perkins as Joseph K is at its centre. After Psycho (1960), it might have been hard for Perkins to appear entirely innocent. But in Joseph K’s confrontations with women (Jeanne Moreau, Romy Schneider, Elsa Martinelli), Welles’s camera probes K’s sexual uncertainty, almost forcing Perkins to betray every embarrassment and awkwardness, unable either to act upon desire or to be rid of it. Notwithstanding its exploration of guilt in terms of a frenzied nightmare, the film confronts its noir-ish, absurdist side with an almost classical sense of composition and control which makes it all the more haunting.

For information about the Guilt Group’s work, see http://www.bbk.ac.uk/bisr/research/guilt-working-group

BIMI is funded across three schools at Birkbeck: the School of Arts, School of Law, and School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy. The University of Pittsburgh is also a partner and co-funder.

FREE ADMISSION  I  Registration Required
Register and learn more at http://www.bbk.ac.uk/arts/research/birkbeck-institute-for-the-moving-image