

Kevin Thompson

adjusts New York



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Images Universal Pictures

The influential work of science fiction novelist Philip K. Dick returns to the silver screen in *The Adjustment Bureau*, directed by George Nolfi. Matt Damon plays a politician destined for prominence; having become a congressman at age 24, he is now campaigning for a seat in the US Senate. A chance encounter with a ballerina sparks a love affair, but a mysterious cadre – architects of destiny – manipulates their lives in an effort to keep them apart and on their seemingly predestined paths.

The Adjustment Bureau lacks the bombastic visual aesthetic common in earlier films derived from Dick's work, such as *Blade Runner*, *Total Recall* and *A Scanner Darkly*. Production designer Kevin Thompson takes a more subversive approach, using a preponderance of vast, tall spaces 'suggestive of otherworldly

power'. The most visually arresting attribute resides 'in the shadowy fedora-wearing adjusters' ability to move nonlinearly from place to place through conventional doors'. A door that should lead to a broom closet acts as a portal, temporarily opening to the street or linking the Adjustment Bureau to Yankee Stadium or the Statue of Liberty.

It's a wondrous visual device, ideally suited to cinema and, in the words of Rem Koolhaas, to 'Manhattan's culture of congestion', yet one that's also symbolically symptomatic of technology's effect on space-time and its impact on the evolution of architecture and urban landscapes. In his essay, 'Bigness', Koolhaas notes how the lift 'renders null and void the classic repertoire of architecture'. Issues of composition, scale, proportion and detail, he continues, 'are now moot when a building acquires bigness'. On a larger scale, Koolhaas created a map

showing how mass transportation and mass communication alter the perception of space-time and distance. Thanks to technology, a physically distant place may appear closer than a nearby locale if the latter is less accessible in terms of transport and communication.

A protégé of Rem Koolhaas, Alejandro Zaero-Polo of FOA, further notes how 'the world is shaped by two types of mechanisms, spatial and temporal displacement, embodying the idea of a fluid reality': one not devoid of borders but where borders are reorganized.

Towards the end of the film, Matt Damon's and Emily Blunt's characters find themselves atop 30 Rockefeller Plaza, which in the film constitutes the roof of the amalgamated Adjustment Bureau Building. They leave through the door only to find themselves back on the roof. The borders of space-time adjusted.