

# The Skyscraper as Site of Social Anxiety. Investigating the Cinematic Representation of Milanese Skyscrapers (1954–1965)

## Abstract

In the mid-1950s, the first skyscrapers emerged from the mass of low houses that sprawled over the metropolitan area of Milan. Iconic buildings such as Torre Velasca, Torre Pirelli, and Torre Galfa instantly defined a new phase of cultural, economic, and technological advancement. The image of the city was profoundly altered, transformed into a forward-looking icon of modernity. Italian cinema was quick to react to the change and immediately began to portray the new building type that was its center, depicting the social and cultural effects of its imposition on the fabric of the city. This paper investigates the ways in which Italian cinema represented the vertical city, arguing that skyscrapers brought about new values dictated by a capitalist and consumerist society that was burgeoning in Milan during the period. The study identifies three distinctive elements in the *mise-en-scène* of the high rises: lighting, air, and the elevator. Each depicts anxiety towards new architectural forms, and in doing so serves as a key to understanding contemporary social changes.