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**Vincent Ward:
The Emergence of an Aesthetic**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
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Abstract

This thesis examines the work and career of New Zealand director, Vincent Ward, focusing on the emergence of his distinctive aesthetic. It places this aesthetic in the context of local and European artistic and filmic traditions (in particular, certain forms of Romanticism and Expressionism) that have influenced Ward's work. It also explores how his childhood and education may have shaped his approach, and examines what his aesthetic has meant in practice, in the process of making each of his major films, as well as in the formal characteristics of the completed films. The study focuses to a greater extent on his early (New Zealand) films as case studies that help us to understand the development of his practice and theory. The career of Ward as a filmmaker who has had a significant influence on the development of the New Zealand film industry is also explored in the light of what may differentiate his approach from that of other local filmmakers and the extent to which it is useful to think of him as a "New Zealand filmmaker".

This thesis draws from extensive primary research in the form of interviews with the director, his family, associates and collaborators (cameramen, editors, co-writers, producers and so on). Textual study has involved the viewing New Zealand and Expressionist films and art-works, and the examination of archival and unpublished material. Secondary research has included coverage of European and local artistic and filmic traditions and the relatively limited body of criticism of Ward's films.

While this thesis takes an essentially *auteurist* approach – identifying characteristic themes, visual motifs and stylistic tendencies – it also seeks to expand and reposition such an approach by taking into account intellectual and cultural history, the contributions of Ward's collaborators, and the complex industrial conditions in which his films were produced. To do so has necessitated a close examination of the filmmaking process. By examining the aesthetic of such a director – known for his heightened individualism, perfectionism, and unusual methods - this study has sought to reveal the strengths and limitations of classic *auteur* theory, suggesting ways in which this approach can be modified and re-invigorated.

The thesis also provides a case study in the difficulties faced by a director of this kind in finding a satisfactory base within the contemporary film industry. The alignment of local and global interests and investments is still a highly complex business.

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