

## Chapter Three

# A Mode of Production and Distribution

### An Economic Concept: "The Small Budget Film," Was it Myth or Reality?

IT HAS OFTEN BEEN ASSUMED that the New Wave provoked a sudden break in the production practices of French cinema, by favoring small budget films. In an industry characterized by an inflationary spiral of ever-increasing production costs, this phenomenon is sufficiently original to warrant investigation. Did most of the films considered to be part of this movement correspond to this notion of a small budget? We would first have to ask: what, in 1959, was a "small budget" movie?

The average cost of a film increased from roughly \$218,000 in 1955 to \$300,000 in 1959. That year, at the moment of the emergence of the New Wave, 133 French films were produced; of these, 33 cost more than \$400,000 and 74 cost more than \$200,000. That leaves 26 films with a budget of less than \$200,000, or "low budget productions;" however, that can hardly be used as an adequate criterion for movies to qualify as "New Wave."<sup>1</sup> Even so, this budgetary trait has often been employed to establish a genealogy for the movement. It involves, primarily, "marginal" films produced outside the dominant commercial system.

### Two Small Budget Films, "Outside the System"

From the point of view of their mode of production, two titles are often imposed as reference points: Jean-Pierre Melville's self-produced *Silence of*

*the Sea*, 1947, and Agnes Varda's *La Pointe courte* (*Short Point*), made seven years later, in 1954. Both of these film projects figure largely in the "chronology of new French cinema landmarks" proposed in the December 1962 special issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma* devoted to the New Wave; that chart was an expanded version of Labarthe's genealogical list.

Jean-Pierre Melville (which was a pseudonym for Jean-Pierre Grumbach, born 1917) had proclaimed himself "inventor of the New Wave": "which is an artisanal system of production, shot in real locations, without stars, with minimal equipment and very fast film stock, without first worrying about a distributor, or official authorization, or servitude of any sort."<sup>2</sup> Melville had already shot under just such conditions back in 1945 when he made a short film, *24 Hours in the Life of a Clown*, though short films were often shot on tiny budgets. He was much more audacious when, in 1947, he leapt into producing and directing an adaptation of the novel *Silence of the Sea* without even getting the permission of the author, much less paying any rights, and without having received authorization to film from the Centre nationale de la cinématographie (CNC). The budget was minimal, \$18,000 (though some sources put it at even less), at a time when the average cost for a French film was between \$100,000 and \$120,000. None of his collaborators had professional cards or belonged to the official guilds or unions, which dragged out the post-production process for a very long time, as Melville tried to work things out with the CNC after the actual filming was already finished.

A private premiere of *Silence of the Sea* took place in November 1948, but its commercial release did not occur until April 1949. The movie met with strong critical and even popular success, and thus proved a new lesson that would take ten years to really catch on: a very low budget film (meaning roughly a tenth of the average budget), could possess real aesthetic qualities and also generate good business at the box office. *Silence of the Sea* remained an isolated example, even though Melville directed and produced another feature in 1949, which was another adaptation, this time of Jean Cocteau's *Parents terribles* (*The Strange Ones*), with full agreement from the author. However, this film was a failure at the box office, requiring Melville to accept a commercial assignment to direct a movie he did not write, adapt, or produce: *Quand tu liras cette lettre* (*When You Read this Letter*, 1953).

The second example was even more atypical. When she launched into her adventure of producing *La Pointe courte*, Agnes Varda, a photographer for the National Theater in Paris, was only 26 years old. Her initial budget was targeted at \$24,000, but she had to reduce it to \$14,000, with herself, the crew, and actors all working as a cooperative, the Ciné Tamaris Company. They shot for several weeks on location in the fishing village of La Pointe Courte on the Mediterranean coast near Sète, where they used natural interiors and exteriors:

Tamaris Films only managed to gather one quarter of the necessary production costs. Hence the proposal made to the actors and technicians to form a cooperative that would own 35 percent of the film. In effect, that was to say: no one gets paid during filming. It took 13 years to reimburse them their share of the work-capital. The film was only made thanks to the generosity of the actors Silvia Monfort and Philippe Noiret, and to the enthusiasm of the young crew members. Most of all, thanks went to Carlos Vilardebo, catalyst of my dream project and of my desire to tell the life of the fishermen at La Pointe Courte and their families, whom I really loved.<sup>3</sup>

Here again, the film was directed totally outside the industrial circuit; though shot in 35 mm, it was made without authorization because it did not follow the rules established by the CNC. It was thus considered to be the equivalent of a 16mm film: an amateur production that could not be exhibited commercially. No distributor would agree to take it on. In 1956, two years after its completion, *La Pointe courte* nonetheless received access to a Studio Parnasse movie theater, thanks to the French Association for “Art et Essai” Cinemas; it won critical praise during its two-week run. Nonetheless, the production could not recoup its funds. The production experience of *La Pointe courte* was valuable in demonstrating to future directors the crucial importance of the distributor. Yet it is important to clarify that Varda’s film was not the only one in this situation: several dozen feature-length films produced within and outside the commercial circuit remained unseen during the 1950s, which is a phenomenon we will revisit when discussing the distribution of the eventual New Wave films.

The lessons on small budget filmmaking offered by these two directors is not sufficiently conclusive. Melville had to resign himself to accepting an

impersonal assignment after his first failure. Agnès Varda could not even enter her film in competition for the CNC competition for production aid, since it was made outside the system, so she began making a series of short films before being able to return to feature film production eight years later, following the successes of Chabrol, Truffaut, and Godard during the years 1958–60. The myth of small budget projects earning solid profits would not really take shape until a number of consecutive titles saw large commercial successes, and even then the phenomenon would not arrive until spring of 1959 and would last just two years.

### Good Economic Health

At the end of the 1950s, French cinema was in very good economic shape. The production sector had overall earnings of 1.3 billion old francs from production costs of 7.4 billion francs, according to the findings of Jacques Ploquin, based on a survey of the economic conditions of the government that was carried out in December 1956. If we look to 1952 to determine the profitability of the 123 films produced that year, we notice that their box office figures reveal that 61 films made money, while 62 lost money. Of the 61 profitable movies, the average profit margin was \$85,000. For the other 62, their average losses were at \$40,000 while their average costs were \$110,000. The numbers reveal that it was the lower-cost films that most often lost money. Thus, it was not for reasons of financial rationalization that small budget films were considered advantageous, but rather the reasons were initially aesthetic (though of course they became economic when the films began eventually to make money).

Admittedly, it was the big budget movies that proved to be top at the box office. In 1955 the leaders were *Napoleon* (Sacha Guitry), *Les Diaboliques* (Clouzot), and *The Red and the Black* (Autant-Lara); for 1956 the top money-makers were *The Grand Maneuver* (René Clair), *The Silent World* (Malle and Cousteau), and *Si Paris nous était conté* (*If Paris had Listened to Us*, Guitry, again). All of these are historical frescoes, costume dramas, and literary adaptations. The only exception joining the list is Commander Cousteau's movie, but it represents the documentary genre,

which, once every 20 years or so, manages an exceptional triumph, as *Microcosmos* (Claude Nuridsany and Marie Pérennou) did in 1996.

With the beginning of the 1957 movie season, three films imposed themselves commercially: *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Delannoy), *Four Bags Full* (Autant-Lara), and *Gervaise* (Clément). These were the three films attacked by the editors at *Cahiers du Cinéma* in their May 1957, round table article, “Six Characters in Search of Auteurs,” while they would also go after Jacques Becker for *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (1954) and *The Adventures of Arsène Lupin* (1957), despite the contradiction that Truffaut had voiced unwavering support for Becker in the name of his own theory.

In opening this historic issue of *Cahiers* devoted to the “The Situation of French Cinema,” they found a first-class spokesperson in the director of the CNC, Jacques Flaud, who was interviewed by Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and André Bazin. One fact recurs in all his responses: the cinema’s economic health was very good but its artistic situation was troubling. This analysis found a favorable echo in the pages of *Cahiers*. The good economic health had two causes: first, the high level of attendance, which, we can recall, was made up of 423 million tickets sold in 1947 and 411 million in 1957, with only a slight drop in 1952, making an average of 390 entries for the years 1947–57. Second, French films were largely dominating the marketplace, with American competition only really manifesting itself later in the 1960s. Jacques Flaud pointed out that during this period French cinema exported well: in 1956, nearly 40 percent of receipts came from foreign markets. But he also raised a third cause: the intervention by the state with its “Film Aid” scheme, begun in 1948 and improved in 1953. Flaud even saw this automatic aid as providing the principal source of the recent prosperity and asked whether perhaps the current artistic sclerosis might not result from “this silly security, brought on by the aid.”

## A Subsidized Cinema

The first law, voted into existence in September 1948, decreed a “special additional tax” levied on box office tickets to establish a “development fund,” later rebaptized “support fund.” It encouraged more thrift within the

profession by instituting an obligatory deduction in advance on receipts which could then be recuperated to be used on another film. This method of forced auto-financing was destined to intensify national production in the face of the scarcity of capital and the threat of economic and cultural colonialization of France brought on by the affluence of American films after World War II. The special tax on receipts hit all tickets sold, including those for imported films, so domestic French production benefited from aid supported in part by foreign films. This was a typical protectionist measure, considered in 1948 to be “temporary aid funds,” but continually reapplied ever since under different methods which still today help support French film production.

The new law in 1953 retained the same principles but added several new elements, the most important being the introduction of the criterion of quality. Henceforth, the *quality* of a film would warrant a reward, or at least encouragement. Films benefiting from this provision must be French and “of a nature to serve the cause of French cinema or to open new perspectives on cinematic art.” However, it was necessary to await the Order in Council of May 1955 before certain films could begin to benefit from this “quality bonus.”

In 1956, the director of the CNC denounced the disastrous effects of an automatic aid system that gave creative talent an industrial frame of mind and made producers think more like exporters, since the amount of aid increased with receipts. The consequence of the aid rules was to favor films dealing with relatively facile subjects, featuring international stars, shot from stories by known writers from tales that had already proven their marketability in earlier filmed versions. Hence, there were more adaptations and remakes, “films that resort to proven talents and established actors with international, commercial reputations.” These arguments were the institutional versions of the more polemical and personal views of François Truffaut. Jacques Flaud just went as far as stimulating the ardor of the producers, encouraging them to take greater risks, try out new actors, and to envision an artistic renewal, heading in the direction of a cinematic rejuvenation and reawakening. This official program was announced at the beginning of 1957 and helps us understand why the CNC would look favorably upon the first productions by Claude Chabrol and François Truffaut, allowing both their

small companies to shoot outside the rules with smaller crews, which greatly angered the technicians' unions.

In 1956, several films benefited immediately from this quality aid package, which totaled \$220,000. They included *Mitsou* (Jacqueline Audry), *A Man Escaped* (Robert Bresson), *Grand'Rue* (*Main Street*, Juan Antonio Bardem), and *Sikkim, terre secrète* (*Sikkim, Secret Land*, Serge Bourguignon), with Bresson's feature alone obtaining \$100,000 of the total. *A Man Escaped* had been considered "unexploitable" by distributors, but the aid package enabled it to be shown, and it recouped its entire aid amount following its very unexpected commercial success. Bresson's daring producer, Jean Thuillier, was thus encouraged in his decision to take risks. We should also point out that it was Georges de Beauregard who received aid for his production of Bardem's *Main Street*, before going on to produce Jean-Luc Godard's first films.

In 1957, a number of first films received quality aid packages, including *Goha* by Jacques Baratier, *Mort en fraude* (*Fugitive in Saigon*) by Marcel Camus, Chabrol's *Le Beau Serge*, *Un amour de poche* (*Girl in his Pocket*) by Pierre Kast, and Louis Malle's *Elevator to the Gallows*. As a result, competition for aid would play a decisive role in the emergence of the New Wave the next year. This motivating factor confirms that the movement did not appear by "spontaneous generation," despite the chance inheritance by Claude Chabrol and the timely marriage of François Truffaut, all of which we will discuss further on.

### The Denunciation of Blockbuster Super-Productions

There were some central figures among those debating the French cinema who were violently opposed to expensive films. The scapegoat for this position was *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, directed by Jean Delannoy and distributed by Ignace Morgenstern, the future father-in-law of François Truffaut, who owned Paris-Films Production and Cocinor Distribution. Delannoy's movie broke all box office records for the 1956–7 season, though Morgenstern told Roger Leenhardt, "I don't pretend that this was a masterpiece, but I do modestly believe that we made an honorable imitation of

the large-scale American productions that have allowed Hollywood to turn out, moreover, some extremely interesting films.”<sup>4</sup> It was this strategy that Jacques Rivette violently denounced:

This film exists and it is sure to bring in plenty of money; we are not going to see it, that’s all. It becomes serious when talented directors are asked to make *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. And, what is even more serious is the moment when these talented directors start to accept making films like these while having an ulterior motive in mind. They too will shoot an \$800,000 movie because that allows them to be considered a big French director because they will make a great deal of money, but at the same time they plan to tuck personal little alibis or clever bits in, but this will not make it a better film, nor will it make it into a *film d’auteur*.<sup>5</sup>

The directors specifically targeted by Rivette here included Claude Autant-Lara and Henri-Georges Clouzot, but also René Clément, whose last film *Gervaise* had been singled out by André Bazin as vacuous. The “characters in search of auteurs” at this round table expressed their disappointment in regard to the recent evolution of the movies by Clouzot, Clément, and Jacques Becker: “In spite of their great successes . . . [they] failed because they thought that finding a style was all it took to create a new soul for French cinema.”<sup>6</sup> *The Adventures of Arsène Lupin* and *Gervaise* were then summarized by Bazin as “the most accomplished films by Becker and Clément, but also their most empty.” This result was attributed to the conditions of production.

Rivette repeated Truffaut’s slogan, proclaimed in his *Arts* editorial: Clouzot, Clément, and Autant-Lara were three big directors found guilty because they were afraid to take risks and they were corrupted by money. He then outlined his provocative aphorism: “What is most lacking in French cinema is a spirit of poverty. Its only hope now lies in . . . new directors taking those risks making films with \$40,000 or \$60,000, perhaps even less, and filming with whatever turns up.”<sup>7</sup> This is precisely what Rivette himself would do the following year, when he threw himself into the adventure of making *Paris Belongs to Us*, whose chaotic direction would drag out for months, with many interruptions due to financial problems, and which



could only start up again each time thanks to support from Chabrol and Truffaut.

This strong aversion toward big budgets remained a constant concern of the New Wave. When, a few years later, Godard agreed to compromise by hiring the most expensive star for an international co-production with producers Joe Levine and Carlo Ponti, he repeatedly stated that, discounting the salary paid to the main actress, his was a low budget film. The main actress in question was, of course, Brigitte Bardot, who was paid \$500,000 out of the \$1,000,000 total budget for *Contempt*. And François Truffaut would later strive to follow larger budget films featuring one or two stars with a low budget film, as he did with *L'Enfant sauvage* (*Wild Child*), which was made right after *La Sirène du Mississippi* (*Mississippi Mermaid*) in 1969.

### Self-Produced Films

To carry out this new practice of “at risk” production, new producers were needed. Several first films have come to be considered as trailblazers, announcing the phenomenon that would then spread during the spring of 1959. We have already cited the earlier cases of Melville’s and Varda’s first features, which were produced too far beyond the norms to be considered part of any school.

Among other precursors, *Les Dernières Vacances* (*The Last Vacation*, 1947), produced by Pierre Gérin and directed by Roger Leenhardt, and Astruc’s *Bad Encounters*, were two films by critic-theorists and collaborators at *Cahiers du Cinéma*. However, both were produced under rather conventional processes in operation during that era. Astruc’s second feature, *One Life*, was a literary adaptation featuring an international star, Maria Schell, and co-produced by Annie Dorfmann, producer of the recent big budget hit *Gervaise*. Thus, even Astruc’s first features failed to use the conditions of production that would define the New Wave.

Louis Malle, by contrast, made his debut with a very atypical project, *The Silent World*, which became one of the big money-makers of 1956. But

he was really just the young technical consultant; it was clearly a film by commander Jacques Cousteau who already displayed a very media-savvy talent. Malle's next feature, made in a much more personal environment, was a conventional production based on a mediocre detective novel by Noel Calef, *Elevator to the Gallows* (1957), which was adapted with the help of Roger Nimier. The most original aspect of this movie was its soundtrack, composed by Miles Davis. Yet, unlike many later New Wave directors, Malle had never worked as a critic, but had studied at the French film school IDHEC before working briefly as an assistant director to Robert Bresson on his *A Man Escaped*. Malle's itinerary toward feature filmmaking was therefore very traditional.

Finally, *And God Created Woman*, directed by Roger Vadim in 1956, displayed a novelty that strongly impressed Truffaut and Godard, but it too was a classic production by Raoul Lévy, built around an international star, Curt Jurgens, who had just come from a huge success in *Michel Strogoff*, itself an international co-production directed by Carmine Gallone.

It was Claude Chabrol who, by producing his own *Le Beau Serge*, thanks to a family inheritance, showed the way. Previously, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, Pierre Kast, Truffaut, and Godard had only managed to make short films, a number of which had been awarded quality aid grants reserved for films in short format. Nevertheless, a cooperative production project had been hatched during 1958, involving several critics at *Cahiers du Cinéma* and several more experienced directors like Alain Resnais. According to Chabrol:

To make films, we came up with a sort of cooperative. It was understood that Resnais, who was one of our friends and whose short films we had praised, would direct his first feature with Rivette as his assistant director. Next, Rivette would direct his own first film with Truffaut as assistant. Truffaut would take his turn, assisted by Charles Bitsch. When Bitsch got his turn to direct, I would be his assistant, etc. This conveyor belt system was not without merit, but it never did get under way.<sup>8</sup>

Claude Chabrol was the son of a pharmacist, originally from the Creuse region in south-central France, who began writing for *Cahiers* in 1953. He also wrote several detective stories for *Mystère* magazine and worked as a

publicity assistant for Twentieth-Century Fox in Paris. In June, 1952 he had married in Marseilles; later, he and his wife inherited \$64,000 from her grandmother. He invested the money in creating his own film production company, AJYM Films, named for his wife Agnès, and sons Jean-Yves and Mathieu. In 1956, in an alliance with producer Pierre Braunberger, Chabrol produced AJYM's first short film, directed by his friend Jacques Rivette, entitled *Coup du berger*. Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Jean-Claude Brialy were the featured actors. This short film, shot in 35 mm, could be considered the first professional production accomplished by the New Wave, since the previous shorts by Truffaut, Rohmer, and Godard had all been filmed in 16 mm, a format which, at the time, was considered "non-professional."

Next, Chabrol decided to leap into feature filmmaking. He wrote two scripts, *Le Beau Serge* and *The Cousins*, selecting to produce the former first because it would be cheaper. The CNC provided him with a temporary authorization to film and the production took place over nine weeks, from December 1957 until February 1958. It was filmed on location in Sardent, a small village in Creuse where Chabrol, as a child, had spent four years during the Occupation. The script was partially autobiographical: Brialy plays the part of a Parisian, François, a verbal stand-in for Chabrol. The two shared many personality traits. The character of Serge, played by Gérard Blain, was partially inspired by Chabrol's friend and script-assistant, Paul Gégauff.

The initial budget for *Le Beau Serge* was \$76,000, but because of cost overruns brought on by the first-time director's mistakes, the final cost reached \$84,000. This is still a very low budget, but, as Chabrol admitted, "it is still quite a bit for a movie with no distributor." However, he also received a *prime à la qualité* – a quality aid grant – from the CNC for \$70,000, which covered the bulk of his costs. Next, the Cannes Film Festival's selection committee chose *Le Beau Serge*, but then changed its mind, accepting François Villiers' *L'Eau vive* (*The Girl and the River*, 1957) instead. Chabrol's film was nonetheless shown in Cannes, out of competition, and a production agent, Bon Amon, sold it to foreign distributors. These advance sales, together with the grant, paid off all the costs of *Le Beau Serge* before it was ever actually distributed. Chabrol could thus throw himself into his second feature, *The Cousins*, employing much of the same

crew and the same lead actors, Brialy and Blain. However, a large part of this project was shot in the small sound stage at Boulogne-Billancourt studio rather than on location in natural light. The sum recuperated by Chabrol from the grant and the initial sales of *Le Beau Serge* totaled \$130,000, which he then reinvested. Bob Amon even negotiated additional production funding of \$50,000 from Edmond Tenoudji in a contract that guaranteed the exhibition of both Chabrol's features. Both films proved very successful in their premieres, distributed by Marceau-Cocinor, which Tenoudji had just bought from Truffaut's father-in-law, Ignace Morgenstern. *Le Beau Serge* premiered on February 11, 1959 at the Publicis cinema and at the Avenue, for a combined Parisian first run of 13 weeks, with 67,176 tickets sold. *The Cousins* did much better: premiering on March 11, 1959 at the huge Colisée and Marivaux, it ran for a total of 14 weeks, selling 258,548 tickets in Paris alone. This commercial triumph transformed the director as well as his two young lead actors, Brialy and Blain, into New Wave stars.

Simultaneously, veteran director Jean Delannoy released *Guinguette* (1959), based on a script by Henri Jeanson, and distributed for its first run to four big theaters on March 4, 1959. It featured three top French stars: Zizi Jeanmaire, Paul Meurisse, and Jean-Claude Pascal. But the film only attracted 81,802 viewers. These figures speak for themselves, and would serve as a lesson to producers and distributors over the next two seasons.

François Truffaut's entry into the profession as young director was almost equivalent to Chabrol's experience. When he began shooting his first short film in 1957, Truffaut was well known for his film articles from *Cahiers* as well as the weekly journal *Arts*. Previously, he had also been an assistant to Roberto Rossellini during 1955 and 1956, preparing and discussing a number of projects that never came about. Truffaut also wrote up a number of ideas and scripts that he tried to get produced, after having directed a short 16 mm movie, under amateurish conditions, which remained unfinished, entitled *Une visite* (*A Visit*, 1954). Then, at the Venice Film Festival in September 1956, Truffaut met his future wife, Madeleine Morgenstern, daughter of Ignace Morgenstern, president of Cocinor, one of the largest film distribution networks in France.

Thanks to help from Ignace Morgenstern, and especially his right-hand man, Marcel Berbert, Truffaut established a tiny production company of his own, Films du Carrosse, backed by a \$4,000 credit line. This amount corresponds perfectly to the budget he would use for his short film, *Les Mistons* (*The Mischief Makers*), which he adapted from Maurice Pons' short story. *Les Mistons* won the young Truffaut the best director of short films award at the Brussels International Film Festival in February 1958, and was premiered in Paris at the famous Pagode theater, along with medium-length films by Jean Rouch and Colin Low.

Truffaut began preparing his next project right away, planning to make *Temp's chaud* (*Hot Weather*), an adaptation of a novel by Jacques Cousseau, with producer Pierre Braunberger, but the project was delayed several times. During the spring of 1958, the anxious Truffaut persuaded Ignace Morgenstern, who had since become his father-in-law, to allow him to make a much more personal story, *The 400 Blows*, whose cost was estimated at nearly \$80,000. Filming began on November 10, 1958, the day André Bazin died, and was completed on January 5, 1959. Most of the filming was accomplished in natural locations in Paris. Following its private press screening, the movie was proposed to the jury for the Cannes Film Festival, which selected it to represent France. In the meantime, the new Fifth Republic was born and, with it, a new Ministry of Cultural Affairs, directed by novelist and filmmaker André Malraux.

*The 400 Blows* won the Cannes prize for best director, but Marcel Berbert's real coup came with his advance sales to foreign markets: the Americans alone bid \$50,000, which covered the actual \$47,000 production costs. But Berbert also sold the feature to Japanese, Italian, Swiss, and Belgian distributors for a sum equivalent to double the film's costs. Thus Truffaut's film immediately made up its production costs several times over. Further, *The 400 Blows* premiered in Paris on June 3, 1959, playing in two large theaters on the Champs-Élysées – the Colisée and the Marivaux – and running for 14 weeks, attracting 261,145 spectators in Paris and, eventually, 450,000 for its French first run. Truffaut's first feature became something of a social phenomenon, seized upon by national magazines and the popular press in articles that confronted problems of unhappy childhoods and educational reforms for adolescents.

### Three Producers

Though the cases of Chabrol and Truffaut were decisive in jump-starting the movement, and its repercussions in the media, thanks both to their commercial and public triumphs, they nonetheless remained exceptions. This movement of renewal in film production would also be carried out thanks to three producers who knew how to seize the historical moment: Pierre Braunberger, Anatole Dauman, and Georges de Beauregard, whose production catalogues contain several dozen of the most important French films of the 1960s.

Pierre Braunberger (born 1905), is the old veteran of the three, making his debut in 1926, producing Alberto Cavalcanti's famous *Rien que les heures* (*Nothing but Time*) and Jean Renoir's *Charleston*. His rich catalogue includes avant-garde films as well as some very commercial works, such as *Vous n'avez rien à déclarer?* (*Confessions of a Newlywed*, 1936) by Léo Joannon, starring Raimu, Marcel Aboulker's *Les Aventures des pieds nickelés* (*Adventures of Nickel-plated Feet*, 1948), or Marc Allégret's *Julietta* (1953), starring Dany Robin and Jean Marais. But Braunberger, always on the lookout for new talents, also supported Jean-Pierre Melville's *Silence of the Sea* during 1947 and 1948. He would also distribute and co-produce ethnographic films by Jean Rouch, grouped under the title *Les Fils de l'eau* (*The Water's Sons*, 1951–5), and produce François Reichenbach's documentary, *L'Amérique insolite* (*Unusual America*, 1958), which was shot with a fast new film stock and went on to be quite successful.

Braunberger would also play a decisive role in the realm of short film production by encouraging short narratives, despite that fact that most short films during this epoch were documentaries and industrial assignments. He recalled the 1930s when many first-rate shorts were produced. During 1947 and 1948 he produced shorts about famous painters and their works, including *Van Gogh*, *Guernica*, and *Gauguin* by Alain Resnais and *Toulouse-Lautrec* and *Chagall* directed by Robert Hessens. But in 1956 he decided to co-produce Jacques Rivette's *Le Coup du berger* along with Claude Chabrol. It was shot in 35 mm in Chabrol's apartment, based on a script by Rivette,

Chabrol, and Charles Bitsch, who also served as camera operator. He also backed Agnès Varda's *O Saisons, O chateaux* (*Of Seasons and Chateaux*, 1956), followed by *Les Surmenés* (*The Overworked*) by Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, *Tous les garçons s'appellent Patrick* (*All the Boys are Called Patrick*) by Godard, based on a script by Eric Rohmer, their *Charlotte et son Jules* (*Charlotte and her Jules*), and Truffaut and Godard's *Histoire d'eau* (*A Story of Water*). Thus, Braunberger is a producer who helped pave the way for the movement's appearance via his catalogue of short films. Yet, as we have emphasized, from the point of view of producers and even more the public, the realm of feature fiction films remains decisive since it is much more important in terms of institutional "visibility" and any hopes of financial returns.

During 1958 and 1959, Braunberger produced three key feature-length films, one after the other, during the New Wave's initial phase: *Me, a Black Man* and *La Pyramide humaine* (*The Human Pyramid*) by Jean Rouch, and *A Game for Six Lovers* by Jacques Doniol-Valcroze. He also continued with other Rouch films, *La Punition* (1962), *The Lion Hunt* (1965), and *Jaguar* (1967). At the beginning of the 1960s, he produced Truffaut's second feature, *Shoot the Piano Player*, Doniol-Valcroze's third, *La Dénonciation* (*The Denunciation*, 1961), and Godard's fourth, *My Life to Live*. All these movies had fairly modest budgets.

Anatole Dauman (born in Warsaw in 1925) emigrated to France and, along with Philippe Lifchitz, formed Argos Films in 1951, a niche company to make films on art, based on the model provided by the Italian documentaries of Luciano Emmer, and often produced on order for Foreign Ministers. In this manner, Dauman produced the first films by Pierre Kast, Jean Aurel, and Chris Marker. In 1953, thanks to an advance by distributor Jean Thuillier of UGC, he produced Alexandre Astruc's medium-length *Crimson Curtain*, which also received a *prime à la qualité*. Next there were Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* and Chris Marker's *Sunday in Peking* and *Letter From Siberia*. In 1959, Argos also initiated *Hiroshima mon amour*. Further, they produced *Last Year at Marienbad* and *Chronique d'un été* (*Chronicle of a Summer*), the *cinéma vérité* manifesto by Rouch and sociologist Edgar Morin.

The Paris release of *Chronicle of a Summer* was accompanied by an article entitled “For a New Direct Cinema,” written by Morin, that appeared in a January 1960 *France-Observateur* magazine:

This film is an investigation. The milieu of research is Paris. It is not a fiction film. Its research involves real life. It is not a documentary. This investigation does not want to describe; rather, it is an experience lived by its authors and actors. It is not, strictly speaking, a sociological film. Sociological cinema investigates society. It is an ethnographic film in its purest sense: it investigates people. It involves a cinematic interrogation: “How do you live?” This entails not simply how you live (housing, work, leisure activities), but also your style of living, your attitude toward yourself and others, the way you perceive the deepest problems and how you see the solution to those problems.<sup>9</sup>

During the 1960s, Anatole Dauman produced veteran Roger Leenhardt’s second feature film, *Le Rendez-vous de minuit* (*Rendezvous at Midnight*, 1961), co-produced Alain Resnais’ third feature, *Muriel* (1963), two features by Godard, *Masculine-Feminine* (1966) and *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle* (*Two or Three Things I Know About Her*, 1967), as well as two films by Robert Bresson, *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966) and *Mouchette* (1967). The budget for these 1960s films were considerably higher than the costs of comparable films by Braunberger and Georges de Beaugard. While they all became major works of the modern French cinema, they did not fit the mode of production specific to New Wave projects, since they were expensive and relied heavily upon studios and post-synchronization.

Finally, Georges de Beaugard (born in Marseille in 1920) would become Godard’s producer from *Breathless* on. However, de Beaugard’s career was very atypical. He began in Spain during the 1950s as an exporter of French films. In Madrid, he produced the first two features by Juan Antonio Bardem, *Death of a Cyclist* and *Main Street*, both in 1956, with the latter earning a *prime à la qualité*. Then de Beaugard came to France, where he entered into a partnership with novelist Joseph Kessel, becoming involved in a very adventurous project shot in Afghanistan, *La Passe du diable* (*Devil’s Pass*), directed by Jacques Dupont and Pierre Schoendoerffer, with Raoul Coutard as cinematographer. Although *Devil’s Pass* was shown at the Berlin Film Festival in 1958, it was not



released until October 1959. De Beauregard fell back to making much more conventional adaptations of novels by Pierre Loti, including *Ramuntcho* and *Pêcheurs d'Islande (Iceland Fishermen)*, both released in 1959 and directed by Schoendoerffer. They were classical productions, shot in color and the widescreen Dyaliscope process, far beyond the aesthetics of the New Wave.

Then, Jean-Luc Godard convinced de Beauregard to accept a detective script idea that he had been offered by Truffaut, and on which both had worked previously over a period of several years, based on a real anecdote in the news. De Beauregard agreed to finance the project, offering a very low budget of \$80,000, the bulk of which went to actress Jean Seberg and her contractual company, Fox. The company owned by Leon Beytout and Roger Pignières, SNC, gave a much needed advance for the film's eventual distribution. Godard lived within the constraints of his contract by shooting very rapidly, in only four weeks, beginning on August 17 and finishing on September 15, 1959. The editing and post-synchronization were much more laborious, and *Breathless* was not distributed until March 16, 1960, when it premiered in four first-run theaters in Paris, running for seven weeks. It was accompanied by an incredibly dynamic promotional campaign, spearheaded by the journal *Arts*.

*Breathless* became a new triumph for the New Wave: 259,046 tickets were sold in Paris, followed by another 121,874 in the major towns in the rest of France. Godard's success saved de Beauregard's film company from what were becoming difficult times; Beauregard was so appreciative that he went on to produce six more Godard features, despite the fact that the second, *Le Petit Soldat*, was banned in 1960 and only released in France in 1963. His company also produced *A Woman is a Woman* (1961), *Les Carabiniers* (1963), *Contempt* (1963), *Made in USA* (1966), and, nearly ten years later, *Numéro deux (Number Two)*, (1975).

Thus, with Godard acting as intermediary, Georges de Beauregard became the principal producer of the New Wave, producing films for Jacques Demy (*Lola*), Jacques Rozier (*Adieu Phillipine*), Claude Chabrol (*The Third Lover; Landru; Marie-Chantal contre le docteur Kah*, 1965), Jean-Pierre Melville (*Leon Morin, Priest*, 1965; *Le Doulos*, 1965), Agnès Varda (*Cléo from 5 to 7*, 1962), Pierre Schoendoerffer again (*The 317<sup>th</sup> Platoon*, 1965; *Objective: 500 Million*, 1966), Jacques Rivette (*La Religieuse*,

**Table 3.1** Attendance figures for older and newer generation directors

<i>Older Generation*</i>	<i>Tickets sold in first run</i>
Best results	
1. <i>The Cheats</i> (Carné, 1958)	556,203
2. <i>The Truth</i> (Clouzot, 1960)	527,026
3. <i>Hunchback of Notre Dame</i> (Delannoy, 1956)	495,071
4. <i>The Baron</i> (Delannoy, 1960)	366,168
5. <i>La Traversée de Paris/ Four Bags Full</i> (Autant-Lara, 1956)	363,033
6. <i>Gervaise</i> (Clément, 1956)	357,393
7. <i>The Green Mare</i> (Autant-Lara, 1959)	320,887
Worst results	
1. <i>Thou Shalt Not Kill</i> (Autant-Lara, 1963)	21,343
2. <i>The Trial of Joan of Arc</i> (Bresson, 1963)	24,105
3. <i>The Mystery of Picasso</i> (Clouzot, 1956)	37,062
4. <i>La Grande Vie</i> (Duvivier, 1960)	43,286
5. <i>Boulevard</i> (Duvivier, 1960)	47,293
6. <i>When a Woman Meddles</i> (Allégret, 1957)	47,654
7. <i>Pickpocket</i> (Bresson, 1959)	48,612
<i>Newer generation*</i>	
Best results	
1. <i>Dangerous Liaisons</i> (Vadim, 1960)	693,955
2. <i>Love on a Pillow/The Warrior's Rest</i> (Vadim, 1962)	481,869
3. <i>The Lovers</i> (Malle, 1958)	451,473
4. <i>The Silent World</i> (Cousteau and Malle, 1956)	280,411
5. <i>The 400 Blows</i> (Truffaut, 1959)	261,145
6. <i>Breathless</i> (Godard, 1960)	259,046
7. <i>The Cousins</i> (Chabrol, 1959)	258,548
Worst results	
1. <i>Les Carabiniers</i> (Godard, 1963)	2,800
2. <i>Ophélie</i> (Chabrol, 1962)	6,983

Table 3.1 *Continued*

<i>Older Generation*</i>	<i>Tickets sold in first run</i>
3. <i>The Third Lover</i> (Chabrol, 1962)	8,023
4. <i>Les Godelureaux</i> (Chabrol, 1961)	23,408
5. <i>Portuguese Vacation</i> (Kast, 1963)	27,913
6. <i>Lola</i> (Demy, 1961)	43,385
7. <i>The Snobs</i> (Mocky, 1962)	44,491

\* We use these labels guardedly since, aesthetically, it could be argued that Robert Bresson and Jacques Becker fit closer to the “newer generation” and Philippe de Broca and Roger Vadim are closer to the “older generation,” but we have divided the directors according to the biographical lists regularly published in the New Wave era, and retained as well by historian Pierre Billard.

1966; *L'Amour fou*, 1968), and Eric Rohmer (*La Collectionneuse*, 1967). The result is an incredibly impressive filmography.

In Braunberger, Dauman, and de Beauregard, the CNC's Jacques Flaud had found three daring producers who lived up to his 1957 call for new production concepts. All that remains is for us to look at the results of the financial fates of the New Wave films compared to those of the so-called “tradition of quality.”

### Films by “Old and New” Directors in the Public Arena

A young American film student, Ignazio Scaglione, in an unpublished study, selected ten “older generation” directors and ten new, young directors and then compared the global attendance numbers for all their films released between 1956 and 1963. His attendance figures for the older generation – Allégret, Autant-Lara, Becker, Bresson, Carné, Christian-Jacque, Clément, Clouzot, Delannoy, and Duvivier – came to a total of 9,888,538 tickets sold in their first runs, for an average of 159,444 entries per film. For the newer generation he selected de Broca, Chabrol, Demy, Godard, Kast, Malle, Mocky, Resnais, Truffaut, and Varda. Their totals were 7,168,078, with an average of 143,361 tickets sold per film (see table 3.1). The box office

results obtained by the newer directors were thus somewhat lower than those for the directors from the previous generation, but the difference is not that marked, especially given that some of the New Wave titles, such as Chabrol's *L'Oeil du malin* and *Ophélie*, or Godard's *Les Carabiniers*, had been resounding financial flops, while other films on the list, especially *Hiroshima mon amour* and *Last Year at Marienbad* by Alain Resnais, were aimed at an intellectual niche audience. Table 3.1 illustrates the contrast between the greatest financial successes and failures in each category.

Those hostile to the New Wave have always claimed that it led to the production of dozens of movies that were “unprojectable” and thus no distributor would agree to try to find them a public. Further, they then point to the New Wave's low budgets. This phenomenon of a lack of a commercial distribution contract, even on surprisingly low cost films, occurs fairly often and in all eras of film production. Typically, the problem is that the films' production is never finished because of a lack of adequate completion financing, or occasionally because of disagreements between directors and producers. However, in 1962, there were just as many New Wave films as there were “old guard” films that remained on their producers' shelves. Luc Moullet provides the list:

In fact, there are 22 films older than 20 months (the time after which movies are considered unmarketable) and thus unreleased in Paris: *Un jour comme les autres* (*A Day Like the Others*, Bordry), *Merci Natercia* (Kast), *La Ligne de mire* (*Line of Fire*, Pollet), *L'Engrenage* (*Caught in the Gears*, Kalifa), *Sikkim* (Bourguignon), *La Mort n'est pas à vendre* (*Death is Not for Sale*, Desrumeaux), *Au coeur de la ville* (*Center of Town*, Gautherin), *Les Petits Chats* (*Kittens*, Villa), and three banned by the censor: *Morambong* (Bonnardot), *Le Petit Soldat* (Godard), *Playboys* (Felix).<sup>10</sup>

These 11 were all by young directors. Moullet then adds 11 titles by directors representing the older generation, some of whom have very long filmographies: *Les Copains du dimanche* (*Sunday Buddies*, Aisner, it features Jean-Paul Belmondo just before he made *Breathless*), *Ça aussi, c'est Paris* (*That too is Paris*, Cloche), *Trois Pin-ups comme ça* (*Three Pin Up Girls Please*, Bibal), *L'Or de Samory* (*Samory's Gold*, Alden), *La Blonde des*

*tropiques* (*The Tropical Blonde*, Roy), *Un homme à vendre* (*One Man for Sale*, Labro), *Le Train de 8h 47* (*The 8:47 Train*, Pinoteau, unfinished), *Le Tout pour le tout* (*All for All*, Dally), *L'Espionne sera à Nouméa* (*The Spy Will be at Noumea*, Pécelet), *Chasse à l'homme* (*Man Hunt*, Mérenda), and *Qu'as tu fait de ta jeunesse?* (*How Did You Lose Your Youth?* Daniel). None of these films was banned by the censor, and most of them were never shown commercially.