

## TALKS FROM THE CONVENTION

# Translating for TV: Ionesco's "Hard-Boiled Egg" for American Audiences

SARA KIPPUR

In 1962, Barney Rosset, the publisher of Grove Press, asked Eugène Ionesco if he would be interested in writing a screenplay for American television. The request arrived at an opportune moment in Ionesco's career: after the success of plays like *La cantatrice chauve* (*The Bald Soprano*), *La leçon* (*The Lesson*), and *Rhinocéros*, Ionesco had just completed his first short screenplay (*La colère* [*Anger*]) and was eager to further his experience in filmmaking. The screenplay that Ionesco wrote for Grove, "L'œuf dur" ("The Hard-Boiled Egg"), was part of Rosset's Evergreen Project, which aimed to produce a series of short TV films by several other avant-garde writers and playwrights, including Samuel Beckett, Marguerite Duras, Harold Pinter, and Alain Robbe-Grillet. "The Hard-Boiled Egg," however, was never produced; funding dried up, and only Beckett's *Film* ever reached the production phase.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the material traces of "The Hard-Boiled Egg," both in French and in English translation, demonstrate how the opportunity to write for an American audience profoundly shaped the content of Ionesco's screenplay. This essay offers the first scholarly analysis of Ionesco's script based on archival collections on both sides of the Atlantic. The original French text, although absent from the Pléiade edition of Ionesco's works, exists in completed manuscript form, as does the English translation by Richard Seaver, the editor and in-house translator at Grove. Despite multiple efforts in the mid-1960s, Ionesco's publishers failed to find a new funder to produce the work, and so this reading relies entirely on archival manuscripts rather than filmed footage. In that sense, this essay echoes Jean-Louis Jeannelle's call to attend critically to film scripts that never reach the production phase.<sup>2</sup> The screenplay drafts of "The

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Hard-Boiled Egg" reveal how Ionesco engaged with translation interlingually and intersemiotically. On the one hand, the text exemplifies what Rebecca L. Walkowitz has called "born-translated literature," in that translation was a crucial and fundamental "condition of [its] production" (4). As a commissioned work, the screenplay was created for a translation market, conceived and written with an eye to its reception by television viewers in the United States. The interlingual excisions that took place from French to English show us how Ionesco calibrated the text for an American viewing public. On the other hand, in writing the screenplay, Ionesco experimented with translating his work conceptually from stage to screen. "The Hard-Boiled Egg" suggests that, despite some critics' laments that Ionesco had turned away from parody and subversion in his theatrical productions of the 1960s (e.g., *Jacquart lii*), he instead channeled that parodic impulse in innovative ways. The task of writing for television, and particularly for an audience of American viewers, enabled Ionesco to engage with social issues that he had yet to confront in his theatrical writings and that he saw as necessitated by new media forms.

### Early Experiments in Film

Ionesco's interest in alternative modalities likely stemmed, in part, from his previous, brief foray in radio, as well as from the recent adaptations of his theatrical productions to new media. In Vichy France, as Julia Elsky has shown, Ionesco was intimately involved in writing and producing radio plays as part of his wartime employment for the Romanian delegation. These productions, problematic as they were from a propagandistic point of view, dramatized questions of national identity and language that would become formative in his theatrical writing (353–54). Years later, Ionesco would again encounter his theater on the radio. One of the first performances of *Rhinocéros*, even before its 1960 opening at Paris's Odéon-Théâtre de France, appeared in a 1959 English translation for the BBC radio, and *Les chaises* (*The Chairs*) aired in 1961 as a live-performed television production.

Ionesco was not personally involved with either staging, but he became intrigued by the idea of adaptation, for aesthetic and conceptual reasons, and probably for financial ones too. At his request, *Variety Magazine* published an advertisement in their 2 January 1963 issue stating that "MR. EUGENE IONESCO"—his name bolded in large capital letters—personally "requests all [sic] agencies, theater directors and producers in the realms of theater, motion picture, radio, recording companies, etc." to send proposals to him through his publishers in the United States or France (Advertisement). The advertisement, which Ionesco had drafted in French in a December 1962 letter to Rosset, reflected his eagerness to support new versions of his work across languages and genres.

In contemplating screenplay ideas for Rosset's Evergreen Project, Ionesco came up with two possible options. The first, "Samedi dernier au hamman-bad" ("Last Saturday in Hammam-bad"), was a not-so-subtle sendup of Robbe-Grillet and Resnais's recently released *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year in Marienbad*; 1961). In Ionesco's version, the setting would shift from a countryside estate to the Marais district of Paris, where a man would be searching for a young blond woman whom he had seen before. She would appear in the most improbable of places—traversing deserted streets, exiting a urinal, buying meat at a Kosher butcher—and only at the end of the film, when the blond woman is replaced by a black woman, will the man declare "c'est bien elle" ("that is her").<sup>3</sup> His second project proposal was "The Hard-Boiled Egg," in which Ionesco imagined two parallel storylines that ostensibly converged around the dual meanings of *hard-boiled*: "un film de faux suspens" ("a fake suspense film"), in the style of an American western, and a cooking demonstration for preparing a hard-boiled egg ("L'œuf dur"). An undated telegram from Seaver to Ionesco declares the press's decision: "CONTRAT FILM PREPARE PAR SALISBURY A ETE SIGNE PAR BARNEY AUJOURDHUI STOP NOUS PREFERONS FINALEMENT OEUF DUR COMME SCENARIO AMITIES DICK" ("Film contract prepared by Salisbury was signed today

by Barney. We ultimately prefer the hard-boiled egg script. Best regards, Dick”).

Regardless of Grove’s selection, Ionesco made clear in both project ideas his explicit interest in exploring the possibilities of parody. Such was not a new mode for Ionesco: he had built his reputation as a playwright whose comical character dialogues satirized the absurdities of bourgeois life, the dangers of political ideologies, and the farce of pseudo-intellectualism. Ionesco was drawn to theater’s capacity to center the “*exagération extrême des sentiments, exagération qui disloque la plate réalité quotidienne*” (“extreme exaggeration of feeling, an exaggeration that shatters mundane reality”; *Notes et contre-notes* 60). In turning from theater to film, Ionesco seemed particularly keen to experiment with how this idea—of exaggerating or adding shock value to the quotidian—might translate to other media, particularly visual ones. As a *Herald Tribune* article aptly put it after an interview in 1962 related to *La colère*, “Mr. Ionesco says he has tried to translate his subject matter into pictorial terms, that is, into a series of images each growing out of its predecessor ‘organically,’ through a chain of inevitable circumstances” (Bransten).

A closer look at the short film *La colère* provides important context for situating “The Hard-Boiled Egg” as a work satirizing the medium of television. The sketch was part of *Les sept péchés capitaux* (*The Seven Deadly Sins*; 1962), a compilation of short films by seven authors and filmmakers—including Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Mauriac, and Roger Vadim—each of whom tackled a different deadly sin; Ionesco was charged with anger. *La colère* depicts a traditional Sunday afternoon—families leaving church, lunch gatherings in outdoor cafés and apartments—that devolves into a series of monumental catastrophes, including the threat of nuclear war. The short film bears all the traces of Ionesco’s irony, in which appearances belie the tragedy of existence. As one woman in the film brags to another, her husband is “*très heureux, vous savez, il s’est très bien habitué à sa paralysie*” (“very happy, you know; he has adjusted quite well to paralysis”).

The film takes the viewer through a series of domestic scenes in which seemingly blissful couples

about to enjoy a Sunday lunch suddenly discover a fly lurking in their soup, prompting total chaos. The film flashes from one household dining room to the next, in which men of various ages, accents, and professions exclaim to their wives that, for the last twenty-five years, they have consistently found “*une mouche dans ma soupe!*” (“a fly in my soup!”). No longer able to take it, couples throw dishes at each other and spout verbal insults. Their anger spills from the home into the street—literalized by flooding water that seeps under doorframes and by fires that erupt from unattended stovetop burners—and culminates in widespread rioting on streets around the world, including actual news footage of antiwar protests and atomic bomb explosions. The film foreshadows this turn from the local to the global. “*Si on écoutait les nouvelles?*” (“How about we listen to the news?”), asks the husband in the film’s first home scene, to which his wife replies by turning on the television in their dining room. It is by way of the television set that viewers are narratively transported from one home to the next, widening their gaze from the TV frame to its placement in each domestic space. In a half-dozen dining rooms, the television set is given pride of place, transmitting news headlines from the same female newscaster as an audiovisual backdrop to the film’s staging of the couples’ marital bliss.

It is noteworthy that Ionesco, in 1961, would center the television set as a common fixture of domestic living space. His representation of television indexes the recent transformation in France that had expanded the network grid across the nation, while it also played into tropes, circulating widely in 1950s America, that television held the promise of domestic harmony and could be functionally integrated into central eating and living spaces (Spigel 34–35; 89–91). Whether Ionesco witnessed that for himself in his recent visits to the United States—he had, for instance, traveled to New York in 1961 for the opening of *Rhinocéros*—we cannot be sure. But we can be sure that television was at the forefront of his mind. On the cover page of a screenplay draft of *La colère* that includes a few scribbled, handwritten notes, Ionesco circles the word “*télévision*” and ends with the parenthetical

note "et peut-être plusieurs télé—" ("and maybe a few TVs—"). During film production, Ionesco expressed his dissatisfaction with the producer's lack of attention to the placement of the television sets: "Dans la partie du film où l'on voit les intérieurs heureux, la speakerine de la télévision et la télévision elle-même doivent jouer un grand rôle: or, cela ne peut se faire car la télévision est invisible, reléguée qu'elle est au second plan" ("In the part of the film where we see happy homes, the TV announcer and the television set itself must play a big role: yet that cannot happen because the television is invisible, relegated to the background"; letter to Bercholtz). Ionesco sought to represent the ways in which the advent of television into the home could disrupt the boundaries between public and private. In the narrative universe of *La colère*, the television operates as a tool of trickery and a threat to domestic life. The newscaster's repeated claims of good news from around the world ("Les nouvelles sont bonnes!"), set against the ensuing scenes of global havoc, enact the film's dramatic irony. Flies may very well have been present in Sunday soup bowls for twenty-five years, but it is the arrival of television technology—the tool that brings that outside world in—that breaks family harmony. Ionesco's take on anger, in all its exaggerated forms, narrativizes anxieties about television as a threat to domestic life.

At the same time, the television set functioned strategically for Ionesco as a narrative tool for swift visual storytelling. The rapid succession of images on an identical and identifiable visual object, from one home to the next, usefully communicated the ubiquity of collective anger. In that sense, the move from theatrical to cinematic modes of storytelling allowed Ionesco to extend his satirical gaze more quickly from the specific to the general. What seems to have intrigued Ionesco about the prospect of writing for the screen was the translation process by which words could transform into a series of images; in agreeing to Rosset's proposal, he described an idea for "une recette culinaire à mettre en images" ("a culinary recipe to put into images"; letter to Rosset [29 Nov. 1962]). This inter-semiotic process of translation is one that Ionesco

would continue to deepen in his American screenplay by thinking with more acuity about the nature of images circulated on TV.

### "The Hard-Boiled Egg" in the Age of Homemaking Shows

Given Ionesco's recent interest in representing television, it seems fitting that he would have been asked to produce a work directly for TV. The French script of "The Hard-Boiled Egg" begins with three gangsters who open fire with machine guns on an old French farm. One comically instructs all the farmworkers to put their hands up, while the other two sneak into the henhouse. Scared by the commotion, the hens start laying eggs at an alarming rate; the thieves gather up the eggs and stash them in their bags. Moments later, a driver arrives in a getaway van to rescue the gangsters from the scene, and "[s]ur le camion, en grosses lettres, est écrit: radio télévision" ("on the van is written, in big letters, 'radio television'; "L'œuf dur" 3). Ionesco's villain is clear—in France, the two media were closely aligned in the 1960s under the umbrella title Radio-Télévision Française (RTF)—but the egg thieves do not get far: they are eventually defeated in a shootout with the police, and the eggs and weapons are left on the side of the road. These opening pages of the screenplay do not make it into the English translation. Instead of an alternating narrative sequence, the English translation maintains only the cooking demonstration, thus making the script easier to follow, less visually complex, and less expensive to produce. Moreover, Ionesco's knock on RTF would have been more legible for French audiences than for Americans.<sup>4</sup> Yet the idea that television was complicit in a certain crime seems to have permeated his thinking at the time of writing the screenplay, and he found other ways of making that satire manifest for American viewers—in particular, through a wider critique of the ways that gender and race are distorted by commercialized culture.

The storyline of "The Hard-Boiled Egg" is carefully attuned to the role of television in the 1960s home. The English script begins with a "shot of a

modern kitchen,” in which a woman wearing an apron holds an egg in her hand. The directions for the earliest shots in the film insist on its pedagogical mode: a blackboard displays chalk-drawn images of an egg’s formation and dimensions, while the woman narrates instructions for cooking the egg, both on-screen and in voice-over: “To prepare a hard-boiled egg, first go to your local dairy. . . . To make sure the egg is fresh ask your dairyman to candle it. . . . It’s preferable to cook the hard-boiled egg on a stove. Don’t put the egg directly on the stove. . . . You must put water into the saucepan, a sufficient amount so as to cover the egg” (6, 6, 10, 11). Yet despite any appearance of conformity to the genre of the cooking show, the script quickly makes clear that something is awry. The camera is instructed to pan slowly over standard kitchen objects and materials (e.g., refrigerator, sink, faucet, Formica table) until “[w]e see a drawer open slowly by itself. Inside, we can catch a glimpse of neat rows of knives, forks and spoons. Another drawer opens, and inside we can see some cups and saucers. Then the camera shows a white cupboard, inside which we can see three onions, a tomato, a dry loaf of bread and a surprised white mouse, which turns away” (5). This ironic subversion of cooking show conventions proceeds throughout the woman’s lesson, in which visual images projected for the audience complicate the apparent simplicity of the cooking task. Alongside her banal instructions for proper saucepan diameter and optimal water quantity for the egg’s preparation, we are presented with outdoor street scenes: houses in a small village, snowflakes falling, a dog jumping away from a car’s headlights. The images become increasingly catastrophic: as the woman prepares to light the stove, we see a “very enlarged close-up of the pipes, the burner openings, the little flames, which grow even larger. A forest fire, incandescent polycanders in the sky above the forest. A woman catches on fire. Fish on fire. A house on fire, etc” (13–14). As people, animals, and cities erupt in flames, the camera returns to the woman, whose face is locked in a “gracious, serene smile” (14). The world burns, but the cooking demonstration continues.

The parodic script makes clear Ionesco’s familiarity with the televised cooking show. In the United

States, so fundamental were cooking shows to the emergence of postwar television that by 1952 two-thirds of all local television stations included a kitchen set (Cassidy 29). Cooking shows in France were similarly adopted early in RTF’s history because they could enact all three of the network’s broadcasting goals: “éduquer, informer, distraire” (“educating, informing, and entertaining”). Raymond Oliver’s *Art et magie de la cuisine*, for one, had been a successful weekly program since 1954, in which Oliver—the owner of Paris’s three-star Michelin restaurant Le Grand Véfour—instructs his assistant, Catherine Langeais, on proper cooking methods, and she, cast as a devoted and somewhat naive protégé, happily echoes back his instructions. In one episode aired in September 1962, Oliver teaches Langeais how to cook an omelet: the opening credits, in which eggs dance their way into a saucepan without any human intervention, would have amused and inspired any viewer with surrealist or absurdist narrative inclinations (“Omelette norvégienne”; fig. 1).

Eggs featured frequently in Oliver’s cooking demonstrations,<sup>5</sup> as they also did on the other side of the Atlantic, catalyzing Julia Child’s television career. Child’s very first appearance on TV was in 1962, following the publication of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (1961), when she and her cowriter Simone Beck were invited to the *Today Show* to cook an omelet live on air. The cooking experiment was a near failure—the hotplate on set did not work as planned—but it taught Child, according to Dana Polan, “to train oneself to shrug off the accidents and contingencies that inevitably would still creep in and needed to be turned into lessons that one could learn from” (122–23). Such would become the aesthetic of Child’s shows—a blend of technical instruction and whimsy—and after this first televised performance, she pitched her own show to WGBH TV in April 1962. The three pilot episodes of what would become *The French Chef* aired in July 1962 and showcased cooking demonstrations of the French omelet, the soufflé, and coq au vin (129). The pilot episodes have been lost from WGBH’s archive, but an episode from the first season, “The French Omelette,” broadcast on 23 February 1963, gives





FIG. 1. Screenshot from the opening credits of *Art et magie de la cuisine* (1962).

us a clue of what the pilot episode on eggs looked like: Child goes on a long riff about the diameters of pans and the proper cooking time for eggs. Where she talks at length, for instance, about how using two or three eggs will vary the cooking time, Ionesco's chef in "The Hard-Boiled Egg" says, "If you want to have two or three egg [sic] . . . you quite naturally double or triple the amount. . . . The number of eggs does not affect the cooking time. This characteristic is no discredit to the eggs. If, despite all precautions, the egg is rotten . . . don't eat it" (21–23).

There is no saying with certainty that Ionesco watched these exact episodes of *Art et magie de la cuisine* or *The French Chef*, although the timing of his script, written shortly after Oliver's and Child's egg episodes aired in 1962, make it plausible. There can be no doubt, though, of the parodic intent of "The Hard-Boiled Egg." The success of the script's parody hinges on the audience's familiarity with the conventions of the cooking show, in everything from the kitchen set, to the exacting cooking details, to the host's calm affect in the face of potential disaster. Ionesco knew enough about television to expect his American viewers to recognize the conceptual frame of the cooking show. In turning to parody, he did what any avant-garde artist does best: he tapped into the zeitgeist of an era and issued a social commentary on the mechanisms that

undergirded the very medium he was deploying. "The Hard-Boiled Egg" keenly registered television's representation and manipulation of women and cultural minorities. Early TV's homemaking shows actively targeted women as viewers—housewives in particular—and they sought, as Martha Cassidy has shown, to foster a sense of intimacy and connection through kitchen sets that looked like they could belong in anyone's home. Shows like Oliver's and Child's conveyed the idea that haute cuisine could be accessible even for the untrained home cook, and their wild success in the 1950s and 1960s, alongside that of other homemaking shows, testified to the role of women as influential media consumers (Cassidy 28).<sup>6</sup> In the narrative logic of *Art et magie*, Langeais—the unpracticed, smiling apprentice—could be any woman watching from home, ready to learn and eager to please her male counterpart.

If in *La colère* Ionesco presents images of devoted housewives who watch TV and turn angry when their husbands cast aspersions on their cooking, "The Hard-Boiled Egg" goes a step further by insisting on TV's manipulation of female bodies and the gaze. The script enumerates in detail how the woman's body should be filmed: "The camera parades slowly along her bare arm, reveals the suggestion of a breast, the neck, the back of the neck, then the woman's face, starting with her chin then ascending to her lips, her nose, her eyes, her ears. Then we see a close-up of large eyes, blinking, then the woman's whole face" (6). The camera directions adhere to film's conventional sexualized gaze, what Laura Mulvey (and other feminist film scholars since) identify as "the indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film" whereby a woman's "visual presence tends to . . . freeze the flow of action in a moment of erotic contemplation" (33). Ionesco's directives apprehend those visual dynamics, scanning the woman's body in a manner akin to the egg, both objects to be consumed. As it unfolds, the script clarifies the young woman's role as a "housewife"—"la ménagère," in the French text ("L'œuf dur")—and in glimpses between her exaggerated, overperformed smiles, we see signs of her agitation: "Shot of the face and bust of the young

woman who, as she says the next sentence”—which will be another bland commentary on cutting an egg —“looks almost furious and speaks aggressively. She reverts to her smiling attitude” (“Hard-Boiled Egg” 27). The housewife’s body betrays her efforts to maintain a veneer of happiness: as she hiccups uncontrollably, while trying to insist on the nutritional value of eggs, “[w]e clearly see that it is she speaking, but she speaks with the deep voice of a man” (29). In this act of defiance, Ionesco desacralizes the woman’s body as a sexualized object, while rendering visible and audible her physical rejection of conventional ideals of fertility and motherhood. By defamiliarizing the woman’s speech through a male-ventriloquized voice-over, Ionesco centers attention squarely on fixed ideas of gender that condition our gaze. Like the egg in the woman’s hand that will transform into something inedible and rotten, this moment of regendering allows her to break out of the role, both in society and for the camera, that had attempted to contain her.

In a gesture that seems noteworthy for its time, “The Hard-Boiled Egg” extends its critical observation of visual culture from gender to race. Ionesco’s theatrical productions had denounced racist discourses before: his satirical play *L’avenir est dans les oeufs* (*The Future Is in Eggs*; 1951) had even done so through the figure of eggs, offering a blistering critique of fascist anxieties of reproduction in hen-like women whose eggs guarantee the survival of “la race blanche” (“the white race”; 138). Already attuned to racist ideologies, Ionesco registers in “The Hard-Boiled Egg” an awareness of the problematic representation of black bodies on screen. As the housewife’s body is about to undergo its physical transformation, the camera reveals a new image:

Close-up of a fat Negro woman, and of her hand bearing the egg to her mouth; close-up of the mouth alone, which opens, the teeth, the larynx, the enormous fingers in an exaggerated close-up holding the peeled egg, the teeth biting into the eggs four times and swallowing it, then the lips, the chin and the glottis moving as the egg is being swallowed. The lips close, the remains of the egg can be seen around the lips. As we see these unhurried

shots, the young woman is speaking, off. . . . The egg is swallowed. Shot of the lips surrounded by the remains of the egg. (27–28)

As soon as the black woman consumes her egg, the housewife will eat hers, prompting her relentless hiccups and the change in her voice, signs of her body’s physical revolt. The script doubles down on that revolt through a narrative alignment with the black body, represented here through tropes that recall the infamous mammy figure of early American cinema and television. Images of what Patricia A. Turner has called “the good-humor, stocky, asexual, dark-skinned black woman” of Aunt Jemima ads, early-twentieth-century Hollywood films (e.g., *The Birth of a Nation*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Imitation of Life*), or 1950s TV shows like *Beulah* invariably confined African American women to the kitchen and portrayed them as flat, uncomplicated characters who lacked internal agency (52). “The Hard-Boiled Egg” seems both to index and chafe against such stereotypes, in ways that echo Lauren Berlant’s reading of Delilah in *The Imitation of Life*: countering dominant readings of the film’s racist portrayal, Berlant argues that the “grotesque hyper-embodiment” enabled by the “extreme close-up” of Delilah’s face “ironizes the tradition of grotesque African American representation in American consumer culture” (125, 125, 128). Ionesco’s script suggests a similar effort by emphasizing these “exaggerated” and “unhurried” close-ups. The text’s claim to visual hyperbole—an image of “grotesque hyper-embodiment”—situates the representation within Ionesco’s wider absurdist project, which consistently turns on ridicule and embellishment as drivers of parody. In that way, race becomes an element of the parody, folded into the script’s broader critique of consumer culture and gender.

### Writing for Translation

Ionesco’s contribution to the Evergreen Project demonstrates how the task of writing for an audience in translation provided an impetus to address issues of visual representation that had yet to occupy his theatrical work. Through his outsider’s gaze,

Ionesco could mobilize his propensity toward satire in relation to both new media technologies and the specificities of American cultural dynamics. "The Hard-Boiled Egg" was written at a time, in the early 1960s, when American television began to signal an awareness of problematic racial dynamics in the United States. Had Ionesco's film aired on American TV, it might have been understood in the context of this turn toward what Donald Bogle has called "socially conscious" television that challenged racist stereotypes—albeit in a more experimental guise than typical primetime drama series (94).

The manuscripts of "The Hard-Boiled Egg" suggest that Ionesco's decision to address questions of race was both deliberate and belated: on a typed French draft, he handwrites the word "noire" ("black") in the margins to refer to the female character (fig. 2), a change that gets incorporated into the English translation. This addition, alongside the summary he had submitted for "Samedi dernier

au hamman-bad," shows that Ionesco became determined to think through the representation of black characters for his American production. From the vantage point of France, where decolonization and the recent war in Algeria constituted the major political upheavals of the moment, Ionesco's script indexes a burgeoning cultural consciousness about race and representation.<sup>7</sup> It would be reckless, however, to overstate his race consciousness: in a brief moment in "The Hard-Boiled Egg" script, Ionesco refers to a passing image of "a Negro's hands beating a rhythm with drumsticks. A few notes of jazz" (17), a resoundingly reductive depiction whose purpose beyond flat stereotype is unclear. But at a time when black characters were virtually absent from the French screen, both large and small, Ionesco's script cracks open a space for discussion and contestation, even if imperfectly.<sup>8</sup> The medium of television enabled Ionesco both to translate a theatrical mode of extreme exaggeration into images and to wrestle with specific representational problems endemic to visual culture and its mass circulation of images. Read in this historical context—even in the absence of a fully produced, televised counterpart—"The Hard-Boiled Egg" should be understood within the broader social fabric of the 1960s, as a work eager to confront the representation and consumption of gender and race on both sides of the Atlantic.

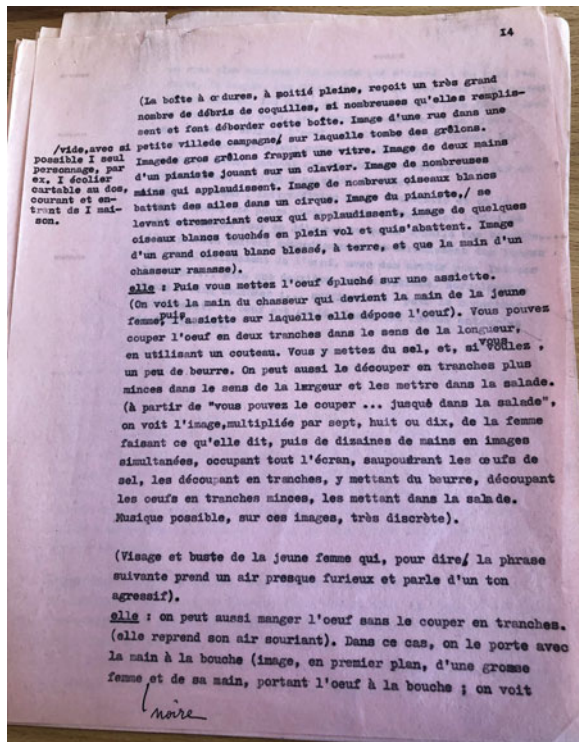


Fig. 2. "L'œuf dur," unpublished manuscript draft.

## NOTES

1. For more on this history, see Halter.
2. Among Ionesco's unpublished materials at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, there are several letters written in 1964 and 1965 between Rosset and A. Dauman of Argos Films that discuss possible new producers for the project.
3. All translations from the French are mine unless otherwise noted.
4. The archival record does not make clear to what extent Seaver, as Ionesco's editor and translator, suggested these cuts, though it is reasonable to expect that his suggestions would have influenced Ionesco.
5. Oliver launched episodes on egg preparations on 3 December 1956 with "Des oeufs," in which he provides instructions for cooking baked eggs, soft-boiled eggs, eggs *en cocotte*, poached eggs,



fried eggs, and eggs Benedict. Subsequent egg episodes aired on 1 January 1957 (“Les omelettes”), 22 April 1957 (“Oeufs de Pâques”), 9 May 1957 (“Omelette norvégienne”), 17 August 1959 (“Omelette camping”), and two more episodes on the popular Norwegian omelet, on 24 September 1962 and 17 December 1965.

6. For a fuller survey of postwar American cooking shows, see Polan 45–77.

7. In this context, Étienne Lalou’s *reportage* on racism that aired on RTF in 1961 made a powerful appeal to viewers to rethink the racist assumptions that undergirded French society (Barrère and Lalou).

8. Thackway notes that “African characters were either entirely absent or visually marginalized in French film productions” (121).

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