



## Transatlantica

Revue d'études américaines. American Studies Journal

2 | 2010

The Businessman as Artist / New American Voices

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When the actress plays the role of the businesswoman

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### Édition électronique

URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/5050>

DOI : 10.4000/transatlantica.5050

ISSN : 1765-2766

### Éditeur

Association française d'Etudes Américaines (AFEA)

### Référence électronique

Aurélie Blot, « Lucille Ball, the Queen of Show Business versus Lucy Ricardo, the Failed Actress », *Transatlantica* [En ligne], 2 | 2010, mis en ligne le 15 avril 2011, consulté le 31 janvier 2023. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/5050> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/transatlantica.5050>

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# Lucille Ball, the Queen of Show Business versus Lucy Ricardo, the Failed Actress

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Aurélië Blot

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## Introduction

- 1 In the pilot of *I Love Lucy*, Ricky told his ambitious wife, “I want my wife to be a wife, I want you to bring my slippers when I go back home, prepare my dinner, and raise my children”.<sup>1</sup> In this sentence Ricky expressed his desire to keep Lucy at home. He tried to convince her that the best thing to do was to remain a good housewife—which was to ignore how ambitious she was as her attempts to be a star were thwarted at every turn. In fact, Lucy was condemned to be a failed actress in every episode of the show.
- 2 In real life, Lucille was everything but a failed actress. As the queen of show business, she was everything that the fictional Lucy wanted to be. Both one of the most famous actresses of the television sitcom and a businesswoman, Lucille Ball was considered one of the most powerful women in Hollywood. However, Lucille Ball wanted neither to become one of the wealthiest women in the United States nor to rule a television company. The only thing she wanted to do was to perform. Yet, the world in which she moved was closely linked to business. In fact, she belonged to the television world in Hollywood where show business, as its name indicates, deals both with performance *and* business. The interrelationship between the two notions consists of performing or producing shows to do business and make money. Thus, the notions of art and business are intermingled in this milieu. In Hollywood, business is always about art and art is always about business. Thus, despite her lack of involvement in business, can we consider Lucille Ball, who was one of the most famous actresses of her time, as a businesswoman? Was she a businesswoman posing as an artist or an artist turned businesswoman? In other words, we may wonder whether Lucille’s business was art or

Lucille's art was business. The difference between those two is not easy to make, but it must be studied in order to understand Lucille's career path.

- 3 To do so, we shall first consider the career advancement of the Arnazes, and attach a particular importance to Desilu—the television company they created—as a family enterprise growing into an empire. In this part we will try to show that Desi Arnaz was starring in business while his wife was starring in the shows, demonstrating how they complemented each other both in life and in show business. Then, we will see how the vagaries of life led Lucille to become a businesswoman in spite of herself, obliging her to make decisions and run two businesses at once while the only thing she was capable of was performance. We will see then how her ability as an actress became a handicap in her attempt to run Desilu. Finally, we will analyze the way she managed to reconcile both her career as an actress and her job as the president of Desilu.

## Desilu, a Family Empire

### A complementary couple

- 4 Very quickly after *I Love Lucy* appeared on the air, Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball decided to create their own television company even though they did not know anything about business. Actually, it was Desi who wanted to see the company through. Lucille was more preoccupied with her career as a performer. She was not interested in business at all, and she preferred to leave it to Desi. Their involvement in the company was clearly represented through its name Desilu. While the name of Desi was presented in its entirety, representing his full time involvement and his concern with the company, only the first syllable of Lucille's name was used, showing that she was the *second* stockholder in every sense of the word since she was the vice president and Desi the president of Desilu.
- 5 Nonetheless, even if Lucille was not interested in running the company, she had to give her opinion on the diverse contracts they signed. In short, she had to say yes or no to various proposals. Desi, as the president and the executive, was the one in charge of promoting the company. He was also Lucille's agent as Fred Ball said in an interview, "Desi protected Lucy and knew how to promote her. He was a large part of her talent. I'd say it was a forty-sixty situation. She knew it."<sup>2</sup> In fact, Lucille would never have been the star she became without Desi and Desi would never have been a great businessman without Lucille. This was something taken for granted, and this was what made them stronger. More than a mere couple, they were dependent on one another in show business. In fact, we cannot say that Lucille was a businesswoman at the beginning of Desilu, she rather contributed to her husband's business being a product, performing in several shows and being a TV star: she was making the show and he was doing the business.
- 6 One could say that they embodied the very notion of show business, in which the show and the business are intermingled. This is a reason why they progressively rose to fame. In fact, Lucy embodied show business more than she was literally involved in it. Her comedy shows made her a comic figure and thanks to her renown, her name and her image were sold in the millions. Desi knew that his chance to be one of the most powerful men in Hollywood was to use Lucille's image in order to sell it. In fact, even though Desi was known as Ricky Ricardo in the show *I Love Lucy*, he was a secondary

character, and the real star was Lucy. This is why he decided to devote his time to managing his wife's life as a star and to running Desilu. Even though Desilu was more Desi's studio production than Lucille's, Desi decided to make a logo bearing the effigy of his wife so that the viewers would be aware of the connection between Desilu and Lucy. It was a sort of marketing stunt and it worked since millions of viewers could see Desilu's logo with Lucy's face on their screen at the end of every episode of *I Love Lucy* and of other shows the couple produced. Thus they could draw a parallel between the actress they loved and the production company.

## The birth of an Empire

- 7 When the company was created, Desilu rented space at General Service Studios and produced sitcoms such as *I Love Lucy* and *Our Miss Brook* which were great US TV hits of the time. In about three years, the studios grew enormously. It made and produced hundreds of commercials for diverse brands including Philip Morris in which Lucy and Desi encouraged the audience to smoke these cigarettes before and after *I Love Lucy*'s credits. Desi Arnaz knew that sponsors were important in his quest for power, but he also knew that by-products from the sitcom could be a good deal too. People in front of their TV sets were always asking for more episodes of *I Love Lucy*. Thus, Desi answered their request by giving them the opportunity to share their lives with objects representing Lucy. Millions of *I Love Lucy* merchandise such as pajamas, bedroom sets, clocks, and dolls were produced. The impact on the viewers was such that in 1954 Desi and Lucy made a profit of \$500,000 selling these products. Besides, since *I Love Lucy* had very good ratings,<sup>3</sup> Desi decided to raise the numbers of episodes which were broadcast on television and buy the episodes of the show for a very low cost from the channel CBS. In doing so, Desi made an unprecedented step in show business since he understood the potential of the rerun of sitcoms on television while the network did not.
- 8 As the company kept growing, Desi and Lucy decided to buy their own studio in 1954 that they called the Motion Picture Center in Hollywood. As Kathleen Brady explains in her book *Lucille*, "they converted four soundstages into theaters for audiences and constructed offices and departments for film cutting and editing, hairdressing, wardrobe, and finance".<sup>4</sup> Lucy and Desi were then the owners of their studio and could create and produce more and more sitcoms and commercials. Thus, during this very year, Desilu's value was estimated at \$10 million and had a turnover of \$6 million.<sup>5</sup> Since their company was doing well, Desi and Lucy started producing several movies, but none of them had the success they expected. In fact, their attempts had failed. About *Forever Darling*, a movie Desi produced and really believed in, *The New York Times* said, "It is a switch to see two people save their energies for television and toss off a quickie for the films."<sup>6</sup> As Desi and Lucille were playing in the film, once again, the woman proved that she was not a film actress. Strangely enough, she was barely noticed on the wide screen while she was a star on the small one.
- 9 Nonetheless, Desi and Lucy learned from this bad experience and focused on TV productions. The Arnazes and Desi in particular were looking for more than just wealth, they were looking for power in the television world. Thus, the couple sold *December Bride*<sup>7</sup> to CBS for \$500,000 and received \$1 million for exclusive rights to their performance in *I Love Lucy* for the next ten years<sup>8</sup>. Desi Arnaz was definitely the one

who was running the company and who was managing Lucille's contracts. Actually, he had to check everything by himself since his wife did not even read the contracts and other important papers before signing them.

- 10 Between September 1955 and June 1957, the Desilu studios produced numerous TV shows and pilots including *I Love Lucy*, *Our Miss Brooks*, *The Danny Thomas Show*, *The Lineup*, *December Bride*, *The Whirlybirds* and *The Sheriff of Cochise* which represented at least an output of 691 half-hour programs.<sup>9</sup> Thanks to all these shows broadcasted on television, Lucy and Desi found themselves a place in the spotlights. In fact, through such transactions, the couple joined the ranks of the tiny group of performers able to take advantage of the business opportunities of television. Danny Thomas, Dick Powell, and Ozzie Nelson were also businessmen as well as stars, but none of them managed to create an empire as Desi and Lucy had. Indeed, Desi was the leader in this business, but including Lucy in his empire, he made her one of the most powerful women in Hollywood.

### Purchase of RKO pictures properties

- 11 While they were filming the last *I Love Lucy* episode<sup>10</sup> in the half-hour format, on April 4, 1957 Desi thought about taking the most important decision of his life. In fact, he made a bid to purchase RKO, the couple's former professional place which had then fallen on hard times. RKO and its properties in Culver City and Hollywood could be sold to Desilu for \$6.5 million. However, the company had only \$500,000 in cash but according to Leeds, the new executive of Desilu and Desi's adviser, it would be able to recoup costs by renting out RKO buildings and facilities to other TV production companies. While Desi gave himself body and soul to this project, Lucy had no part in these preliminary negotiations. First, she was not aware of the RKO situation and second, she did not want to be involved in any business.
- 12 Nonetheless, when Desi was about to make a bid just over \$6 million to General Tire, Ed Holly, the company's treasurer, talked to Lucille about the negotiations. She had to give her approval for the purchase. Kathleen Brady in *Lucille* recalls her speech, " 'RKO is for sale? Can we afford it?' she wondered aloud, and after [Ed Holly] explained that Desilu needed more space to produce its shows, she asked only two questions, first, what Desi thought of the deal, and second, if the RKO employees would lose their jobs. When she heard that Desi was in favor of it and that no one would be fired, she said 'Okay, let's do it' and returned to the set without giving any indication that something significant was afoot."<sup>11</sup> Lucille was not enthusiastic about the idea of buying RKO, for her it was not something important while for Desi it was the deal which established his reputation as a businessman.
- 13 Some time after Lucille's approval, Desi made his offer to General Tire and his bid of slightly more than \$6 million was accepted. At this very moment, the Cuban man was fully aware that he was running the most powerful studio in Hollywood. In fact, at the end of 1957, Ball-Arnaz TV empire had a total of 33 sound stages that is to say four more than Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and eleven more than Twentieth Century Fox. When Desi came up to tell Lucille that they owned an empire, her reaction was quite different from his since she replied "What do you need this for?"<sup>12</sup> Lucille's harsh answer revealed her fear of becoming the owner of such a big empire. She definitely did not need to own RKO property to feel good. On the contrary, she thought that Desilu, as it

grew bigger and bigger, would cause them a lot of trouble. In one of her interviews in 1955, the redheaded woman asserted, "I'm sometimes scared of everything that has happened to us. We didn't think Desilu Productions would grow so big. We merely wanted to be together and have two children."<sup>13</sup>

- 14 Actually, if Lucille did not understand Desi's desire to create an empire, it was because they did not have the same goals in life. Lucy wanted to be an actress for the pleasure of performing, and she was not interested in profit while Desi wanted to be famous and rich using art as a way to reach his goal. This is why "Desi clearly starred in business as Lucy did on the set."<sup>14</sup> Desi's talent was definitely to do business, as it might be an art to make money, Desi Arnaz could be considered as an artist in the way he managed to create an empire with his hands. On the contrary, Lucille was an artist in the strict sense of the word, and she performed for the beauty of the performance. Nonetheless, even if she never totally acknowledged it, she was proud of being the new owner of RKO. Thanks to her husband's business acumen, Lucy, who was to Desilu production what Hepburn and Rogers had been to RKO, became the new queen of the studio.

## Embodying the American Dream

- 15 To the audience who knew and loved them thanks to the sitcom *I Love Lucy*, Lucy and Desi remained a golden couple, the embodiment of the American dream. Both accessing to the material self-fulfillment, they seemed to have all the luck, all the love, and all the money. Americans read headlines in TV guides and other magazines about their million-dollar deals, and after their favorite TV shows, they were used to seeing the Desilu logo, which was more than a mere drawing, it was the representation of power, the creation of an empire, and the fulfillment of a life of work in which a whole family was involved: Lucille, Desi, and their children, but also their employees who were considered as members of a great family.
- 16 As Dann Cahn, the editor of *I Love Lucy*, claims in one of his interviews, "Desi and Lucy always loved the people around them. We were family and we felt it and the company was our life."<sup>15</sup> Desilu was definitely a family enterprise which became a family empire. All executives and most of the stockholders were friends of the couple. While Lucy and Ricky Ricardo were constantly saying that the worst thing to do was to do business with friends, the Arnazes did business with practically no one else. This is how Desilu became more than a mere empire, it was a family empire which had a soul and in which people cared for each other. This family context was definitely what made them stronger as a unified group.

## Lucille, a businesswoman in spite of herself

### The divorce and the beginning of a new life

- 17 While the TV couple Lucy and Ricky were happy, the real couple Lucille and Desi Arnaz decided to get divorced in 1960. After their divorce, Lucy and Desi attempted to run Desilu together, but very soon they realized that they could no longer work with each other. One of them had to buy the other's stake in the company.
- 18 Thanks to Leeds, Lucille and her husband signed a buy/sell agreement in December 1953 whereby either Lucille or Desi could end their business partnership by leaving the

other the option of buying him or her out instead. Since Desilu had already begun producing Ball's follow-up series *The Lucy Show*, they decided that Lucille Ball should be the full owner of the company.

- 19 Thus, on November 9<sup>th</sup> 1962, Desi Arnaz resigned as president and executive of the company and Lucille succeeded him as president. From this very moment, the name of Lucille Ball was written in American history. In fact, it made her the first woman to head a major studio, and one of the most powerful women in Hollywood at the time.
- 20 But did she really want it? Actually, not at all. She was prepared neither to be a full time businesswoman nor to rule a whole company with so many employees. She did not ask for it, the only thing she wanted to do was to perform in her shows. But the only way to keep the company in the family was to become president of Desilu, a thing she did reluctantly. In fact, she had always desired to be famous and to be respected, but to be responsible was something else, it was something that she did not plan and which was intimidating. According to Lucie Arnaz, the daughter of the couple, "[Her] mother was uncomfortable with it all. Basically she was a performer, not a businesswoman. The trappings of power meant very little to her".<sup>16</sup>

## Actress and businesswoman

- 21 Overnight, and for several years, Lucille ran Desilu as President and Chief Executive Officer while at the same time she was starring in her own series *The Lucy Show*. Thus, between scenes, she had to sign contracts or initial labor agreements. As one of her friends Lou Krugman noted, who used to play in *I Love Lucy*, he found her totally changed. When he played a mad chemist on *The Lucy Show* in 1963, "The Lucy I first met was only an actress. Now she would look through the camera and use idiot cards, and it was difficult to do a scene with her when her eyes were looking somewhere else. [...] I really wish she and Desi had not gotten the divorce."<sup>17</sup> In this sentence, Lou Krugman shows that something in Lucille had altered; she was not the same anymore because she could no longer be a full-time actress, she had to be both the president of Desilu *and* the star of the show she produced. But does it mean that she became a businesswoman? Not really. Since Desi was the one who used to deal with business matters, she was totally unaware of the role and the responsibilities of a president. Thus, during the first meeting with the stockholders in August 1963 she had to convince them that she could both run the company and be an actress, and succeed in those two functions. Nonetheless, as she was used to delegating most of her work as a vice president, it was a well known fact that as the president of Desilu she would leave the running of it to others. However, she still felt the responsibility of being the one who had to make the ultimate decisions and had to say yes or no.
- 22 In one of her interviews, Lucille Ball said, "I miss someone to rely on to make the big decisions and I miss the hours I used to be able to lock the door and relax. But I don't resent it. I always felt the responsibility before too, but I never had to do anything about it then. I had been concerned in the past with just my group. Now, suddenly my group is the whole place."<sup>18</sup> Running a company, taking responsibilities, making decisions about contracts and productions were unknown fields to her. By delegating to others, it was a way to flee reality and to evade her responsibilities as the new main stockholder of Desilu. Thanks to this, she could create some distance on the business side of her job and keep going in her actress' life. However, this sudden change in her



function definitely changed her life and her vision of responsibilities. For the very first time in her career, Lucille had to make decisions on her own, and this was no small task for her. Even though she was part of this artistic environment, she did not know anything about business and the way to run a company. Thus, to protect herself and to take on her role as a new leader, she did what she did the best, she performed. And business was the art.

### Lucille Ball, the actress playing the part of a businesswoman

- 23 She was literally playing the part of the president of Desilu. She was not a businesswoman, she acted as one. In one of her first interviews as an executive, Lucille was wearing a blue housecoat which contrasted with her Clown's hair. She looked like an actress on backstage more than the president of the biggest studio in Hollywood. She was ready to impersonate herself as president, exclaiming "oh" when she was informed of developments and "oh really!" when she wanted to give the impression of credibility. But she was not only reciting words she heard from businesswomen on television, she was also acting like a lady executive in an old RKO movie, especially during business meeting where she used to lean against her desk dramatically instead of sitting in her chair. Thus, Lucille was only imitating businesswomen she saw on television or in movies, but she was never herself as the president of Desilu. She did not feel comfortable in this role as an executive woman, because to be a businesswoman was not part of her. It did not suit her personality.
- 24 Though she appeared to control the situation the only thing she actually controlled was her way of acting as an executive. To be president of Desilu was certainly the hardest and the biggest part she had to play in her entire life. In fact, when she was starring in *The Lucy Show*, she could rehearse before the shooting and when one scene was not good, they could cut it and do it again since most of the episodes, contrary to *I Love Lucy*, were not shot before an audience. But as the president of Desilu, Lucille Ball could not make a *faux pas*, she could not forget her lines—because it was real life. And when she met the stockholders for the annual meeting it was always a confrontation as she had to answer questions which sometimes she could not answer. Her job as an actress seemed to take the upper hand. Indeed she was an actress above all, and the stockholders could not bear it because she gave the impression that she was not taking her function as president seriously. At the end of the 1966 stockholders' meeting, one of the holders who was not convinced by Lucille's arguments about the fall of 42% of Desilu's net income, shouted "This has been a real show. Too bad it wasn't shown on television. It might have increased our revenues."<sup>19</sup>
- 25 Lucille definitely appeared to be unfit for business. After all, she was a businesswoman in spite of herself. Yet the truth was that behind this nonchalance, Lucille really wanted to prove to people that she was able to cope with several tasks at the same time. And even though she was acting as a president of Desilu, she was fully aware of her responsibilities and wanted to keep control of the family empire. The only thing which was important in her life was entertainment, it was the only thing she knew and all she wanted to know. As Stefan Kanfer said in *Ball of Fire*, "Marriage, motherhood, leisure—all were subordinated to the main concern of putting on a good show and turning a profit for the Desilu stockholders."<sup>20</sup> From the moment she took over the studio in 1962,



her main goal was to produce new successful shows and to get the company back on its feet.

## Lucille Ball, the Queen of Show business?

### Production of *Star Trek* and *Mission: Impossible*

- 26 In the 1960s, Lucille was a world-famous TV actress. In a few years, Lucy's series included *I Love Lucy*, *Here's Lucy* and *The Lucy Show*, which were syndicated in forty-four countries and translated into more than twelve languages.<sup>21</sup> In the United States, her name was as famous as the President's.<sup>22</sup> While she already had her "Lucy Time" every Monday at 9pm which made her "Miss Monday Night,"<sup>23</sup> a "Lucy Day" took place at the 1964 World Fair in New York City. As a phenomenon in American television, Lucille was definitely a product of business. As Desilu built an empire on Lucille's image, the actress knew that she and the other executives would be able to use her renown as a way to increase the income of the company, especially in producing new shows. In fact, nobody could refuse anything to Lucille, she was so powerful and so famous that she could do no wrong.
- 27 Thus, when she alone decided to go forward with the two controversial series *Star Trek* and *Mission: Impossible* while most of the other executives saw the end of Desilu in them, she was perceived as an avant-gardist woman. In fact, as the executive Leed confessed, "if it had not been for her, *Mission: Impossible* and certainly *Star Trek* would never have gotten on the air."<sup>24</sup> *Star Trek* was definitely not a prime time series since it was too controversial for a mass audience. The Cold War was parodied in this series and social issues were evoked such as racial stereotypes—African American and Asian people were the main characters—and the rise of feminism. Contrary to Lucille Ball who was enthusiastic about the idea of producing these series, Argyle Nelson and Ed Holly, who were part of Desilu's command center, estimated that the cost of *Mission: Impossible* and *Star Trek* was too high compared to their profits. In fact, including their high production values and musical scores, the two series cost \$225,000 apiece to produce each week. The costs of other series produced by Desilu were about \$180,000 and the weekly revenues were only \$160,000 per show. Thus, Ed Holly was totally opposed to producing them because it could lead the company to bankrupt or worse they could have been obliged to sell the company.
- 28 Nonetheless, for the first time in her life, Lucille was self-confident, and after talking to some experts and to Herb Sollow in particular, who told her that, "if [she] want[ed] Desilu to be a major player in the television business, [she] ha[d] got to do it",<sup>25</sup> she took the risk. It was the first time she performed as a businesswoman, the only thing she did was to say yes, but actually nothing could be done without her three-letter word and nothing could have ever happened without her approval. Why was she so convinced of their success? Why did she take that risk while Desilu was not doing well?
- 29 On the one hand, Lucille saw it as a gamble. Since the company was falling into hard times, Lucille decided to stake it all. If it worked, then she would prove to the others, who claimed that she was not able to handle Desilu, that she could take responsibilities and make a good deal by herself. On the other hand, since she was an actress above all, and a politically committed artist, she saw in *Star Trek* and *Mission: Impossible* a way to make people reflect upon American society. It was a way to bring innovative ideas and

change into American television in which too many unreflective family sitcoms were broadcast. She wanted to give a new fresh look to television, and to be the first one to do it was quite a challenge. She was something of a trailblazer in the television field. She showed people that she was an artist who was living in her time, and she understood the changes which occurred in the 1960s and she knew how to take advantage of them. *Star Trek* and *Mission: Impossible* represented all she was looking for: they were modern, controversial, and innovative.

- 30 By the end of 1966, after *Star Trek* and *Mission: Impossible* debuted, Desilu Productions was back in the production business dealing with Vulcans and Klingons<sup>26</sup> and the Impossible Mission Force as well as with Batman and Lassie. The members of the “Desilu family” who went through difficulties with the company were professionally revitalized and the new ones were proud to be part of something successful (*Mission: Impossible*) or unique (*Star Trek*) on television.
- 31 After the 1966-1967 season, Desilu programs such as *Mission: Impossible*, *The Lucy Show*, and *Star Trek* were nominated for 14 Emmys, and both *Mission: Impossible* and *Star Trek* were nominated for the Outstanding Dramatic Series honor.<sup>27</sup> On June 4, 1967 Lucy was named Best Comedy Actress, it was her first Emmy since 1953. *Mission: Impossible* won awards for best dramatic series, actress, writing, and sound and film editing. It was a complete success.

### The end of an empire, the fulfilment of an actress

- 32 Once the company was stable, Lucille had to think of making way for someone else. Since she was not cut out to be a businesswoman, she just made what she had to do, producing successful shows. Her mission was complete. From this moment, people saw her as a talented businesswoman; but she was not, she only managed to play her part as president of Desilu. Now that she was growing old and had proven to people that she was able to cope with two functions at the same time, the only thing she desired was to be a full time actress again. She wanted to go back to her beginnings. Nonetheless, claiming that she was not interested in business did not mean that she was not caring for the company. It was hard to give Desilu to a stranger because it was Desi and Lucille’s baby, it was their product, they built it with their hands and it grew thanks to them. The family enterprise was a part of herself, and this is why it was so hard for her to sell it. As Mickey Rudin said, “She did not think of Desilu on the basis of profit or loss; she thought of it as a family enterprise and was reluctant to sell.”<sup>28</sup> However, she ended up taking the plunge and sold the company to Gulf+Western in December 1967. They paid \$17 million to Desilu stockholders, Lucille as the majority stockholder received \$10 million.<sup>29</sup> But she was not interested in money, the only thing she wanted was to be sure that what she built with Desi would not be destroyed by the new stockholders. After selling Desilu, Lucille confessed, “I cried, I was sad. I didn’t like the idea of giving up Desilu, but running it didn’t interest me. Performing does interest me.”<sup>30</sup> Once again, in this statement, Lucille proved that she became the president of Desilu because she was forced to do it, and she had no choice. She was definitely not interested in being a full time businesswoman since it was not a vocation. She did not care about making profits and being the most powerful woman in Hollywood, what she cared about was performing and acting in the shows she produced.

- 33 Yet shortly after selling the company, Lucille created “Lucille Productions” in order to keep performing in her show. But since she was not the owner of the studio anymore, she had to pay rent on stage 12. However, she put an end to all this very quickly because it was not the same anymore. The family company she had known had been transformed into a cold and impersonal one. At this very moment, Lucille knew that she was not the “lu” of Desilu anymore; she was just an actress who had to make people laugh. Was not it what she had always wanted to be, a full time performer? Yes, absolutely, but somehow she had this bitter taste for having sold Desilu, the family company which had made her what she became, a star of U.S. television and an icon of American popular culture.

## Conclusion

- 34 In show business the notions of art and business are intermingled and usually they cannot be distinguished from one another. For the Arnaz couple, we might say that those notions were clearly separated since Desi was dealing with business while Lucille was acting in shows. Nonetheless, even if Lucille did not want to be involved in business, she definitely was either consciously or unconsciously, as her name and her image were the reasons for the couple’s fame and wealth. Lucille was an actress above all, and she did not care about making profit or loss. She had no interest in buying or selling shows to the networks, and all she wanted to do was to perform. Thus, when she became the president of Desilu, she protected herself from this unknown world of business by doing what she knew the best: she was performing the part of a businesswoman, a part she played very well since she succeeded in becoming one of the most successful businesswomen in the United States. There is no doubt that it was the biggest and toughest part she had to play because it was not natural for her to be a businesswoman. In fact she became an executive in spite of herself and for this reason she was not a businesswoman as an artist but an artist who, for reasons beyond her control, became a businesswoman. As a producer of new controversial series, she was one of the first producers to disrupt American television by suggesting something other than perfect nuclear families. Lucille Ball made people dream because she was the embodiment of the American Dream: the young woman from Jamestown, New York, who began with nothing, who became famous and rich thanks to her ingenuity and her ambition. But more than her version of the American Dream, she gave us access to a new form of art through television by producing modern and controversial series. As a talented actress and producer, she made decisive and artistic choices to give America a new way of thinking and watching television. For all she gave to television and the Hollywood studios, she is and will remain in American civilization as a full time actress and as a part-time businesswoman.

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## NOTES

1. *I Love Lucy* “*The Lost I Love Lucy Pilot*” Season 1, Desilu Productions, United States Paramount Home Entertainment; CBS Video, 2003.
2. Sanders, Coyne Stevens, *Desilu*, chapter 8, 140. Interview of Fred Ball, 1992.
3. Because an average of 2.9 viewers watched each television set, each episode actually was seen by 30,740,000 individuals—nearly a fifth of the U.S. population.
4. Brady, Kathleen, *Lucille*, 225.
5. Figures given in *Lucille*, 222.
6. *Lucille*, 225.
7. *December Bride* was about the adventures of Lily Ruskin, a lively widow who was not in fact a “December bride” but she desired to become one if the right man would come along. It began in 1954 and ended in 1959.
8. Figures in *Lucille*, 234.
9. *Ibid.*, 234.
10. “The Ricardos Dedicate a Statue”
11. *Lucille*, 235.
12. *Ibid.*, 238.
13. *Desilu*, chapter 6, 105.
14. *Lucille*, 226.
15. Dann Cahn, 1991, *Desilu*, chapter 5, 85.
16. Kanfer, Stefan, *Ball of Fire*, 240
17. *Lucille*, 285
18. *Ibid.*, 282.
19. *Ball of Fire*, 252.
20. *Ibid.*, 250.
21. Figures in *Lucille*, 245
22. Her fame was such that when General Dwight David Eisenhower was inaugurated as the thirty-fourth president of the United States only twenty nine million Americans watched their television while the day after, forty four million of viewers watched *I Love Lucy* episode “Lucy Goes to the Hospital” relating the birth of Little Ricky.
23. The American Research Bureau pointed out that *I Love Lucy* was more than simply the top-rated TV show in the nation, it was a real phenomenon.
24. *Lucille*, 293.
25. *Ibid.*, interview of Herb Solow, 293.
26. Vulcans and Klingons are the names of the different groups in *Star Trek*.
27. Figures from *Lucille*, 295.
28. *Ibid.*, 301.
29. *Ibid.*, figures, 301.
30. *Ibid.*, 302-03

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## RÉSUMÉS

Most American people, all generations taken into account, remember Lucille Ball as a great comic figure of the Fifties. Nonetheless, just a few people remember her as one of the most powerful

women of her time. This might be because Lucille Ball refused to be considered as a businesswoman; she wanted to be seen as an actress above all. In this article, I will analyze how Lucille Ball became a businesswoman in spite of herself and how her success as an actress contributed to her success as a businesswoman.