

## **The Cultural Exception(s) of Pierre Lescure: From Canal+ to Molotov TV**

**Dr Charlie MICHAEL (Georgia University)**

Even as its influence extends across media platforms, the Canal+ brand draws regularly on the 'esprit' it cultivated in the 1990s, when a Socialist audiovisual "experiment" became both the hip new source for must-see programming and a flagship for the strategic defense of European cultural interests. Perhaps no single personality has come to symbolize (or profit from) this reputation more frequently than Pierre Lescure, who since his run as head of Canal from 1994 to 2002 has reinvented himself almost constantly. Moreover, since his Canal tenure ended with a now-infamous sacking by Jean-Marie Messier, Lescure's affiliation with the Canal *mythos* has strengthened, resurfacing in different ways in his projects since then. In just the past few years, these include heading up a major reform of social media policy for François Hollande, presiding over the Cannes festival and (in layers of irony) co-founding Molotov TV – a streaming service now poised to "destroy the cable box" and compete for the French cord-cutting market against none other than MyCanal.

This paper proposes a brief discourse analysis of Lescure's career arc, focusing on how his business acumen, strategic approach, and even his personal strengths and failings have become associated with the Canal *esprit* itself. Of particular interest are two moments when media coverage seemed to align Lescure's fate with Canal's and, moreover, with the fate of French protectionism itself. In the case of his firing in 2002, we see how coverage pits him against Messier, whose megalomaniacal capitalism became the perfect foil for Lescure's self-righteous defense of exceptionalism. No accident then that a decade later we find him as the

symbolic head of *L'Exception Culturelle Acte 2* – an ultimately disappointing “reform” of the Sarkozy “three strike” internet piracy policy (HADOPI) in which Lescure endured withering criticism from online activist groups and struggled to adapt his message and persona to the discursive requirements of social media. All in all, what we see here is a truly “exceptional” career – one that personifies, quite literally, the successes and failings of the Canal idea.