My focus in this essay is on the proliferation of both American studies and, not incidentally, of American-style universities in the regions of the former Soviet bloc. This proliferation in both the revamped state academies and the new private universities of Eastern Europe and Central Asia is funded in significant measure by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), which reflects, in turns, the foreign policy priorities of the Department of State. USAID generally operates in partnership with private foundations (for example, the Soros Foundation and; the Eurasia Foundation) and sometimes, though not always, the governments of host countries. USAID’s sponsorship of American studies evokes, of course, the history of Cold War-era public diplomacy, in which the promotion of American studies in client states was aligned with a wider effort to disseminate the American way. In this historical moment, the ambition of the United States to achieve global dominance was fused with an exclusive nationalist hail, which produced the dazzlingly contradictory mandate of the American century: because America is like no other nation, other nations should aspire to be more like America.

But despite the startling recurrence of the old paradigm in the infusion of Eastern European and Central Asian American studies with US government funding, the creation, institutional elaboration, and political imaginaries of what I am calling post-Soviet American studies speaks, instead, to the contemporary dissolution or divorce of the modern nation-state couple. In other words, American studies in the former Soviet bloc is not a vehicle for the interpellation of a local, comprador elite into the organizing ideologies of American political culture. Indeed, as I will suggest, post-Soviet American studies is not an ideological project at all, in the sense that we usually understand the term—though it is, without doubt, an imperial enterprise. More broadly, as I hope to show, post-Soviet American studies marks the extent
to which the nation—the idioms and the affect of national belonging—is no longer the privileged pedagogical ground for the state’s cultivation of its citizen-subjects.

To some extent, scholarship in transnational American studies has been alert to the shifting relations of nation and state in the contemporary moment. Certainly, work in the field has argued in important and compelling ways against narratives of national autogenesis and self-containment. It has detailed the porosity of national culture; the necessary failures of its constitutive exclusions; and the transnational migrations of peoples, discourses, and commodities that we addressed, not so long ago, as strictly national phenomena. It has documented the violence that alone sustains the production of sovereign territory, as well as the epistemic violence that produces the fictive ethnicity of the nation. But in its persistent, field-changing critique of nationalism, transnational American studies remains wedded to the nation as the thing that it is committed to unthink. The career of American studies in the regions of the former Soviet bloc—by which I mean both the conditions of its institutionalization, and the work it performs, on the ground, for Eastern European and Central Asian Americanists—is interesting, among other reasons, for the ways it invites us to revisit, or reframe, the meaning of our investment in the critique of the nation form.

In sketching the contours of post-Soviet American studies, I mean to make two claims. First, the stakes in our collective unthinking of the nation are quite specifically tied to the crisis of the left in the post-Reagan-era US. Sometimes implicitly, but more often explicitly, the aspiration of transnational American studies has been to imagine new conditions for the left political mobilizations that seem so palpably foreclosed within the institutions and venues of US national politics. Leerom Medovoi encapsulates this sense of the field nicely when he suggests that the mission of transnational American studies is, or should be, to “deploy emergent post-national imaginaries on behalf of a counter-hegemonic globalization, oppositional narratives of cosmopolitan interests from below that confront the interests of post-Fordist capital with those of the life that it exploits (human and natural alike)” (177). To be sure, Medovoi’s program orients transnational American studies toward the cultivation of a global left, yet increasingly I am moved to wonder whether the very preoccupation with global leftist solidarities is specific to American studies (and allied fields) in the US academy. At any rate, it does not take many hours of conversation with colleagues in Hungary, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, or Azerbaijan to realize that the political imaginary of transnational American studies does not travel to the regions of the erstwhile Second World, even if much of the curricular content we associate with the transnational turn transfers easily enough. This is not to
suggest that we have somehow failed to produce an authentic transnationalism, nor indeed to impose as the legitimating measure of transnational American studies that, to be what it claims, it must travel transnationally. But it is to suggest that the political imaginary of transnational American studies emerges more than we have cared to know from the parochial context of the United States: from the eclipse of representational politics within the simulacral scenes of American political life and the profound leftist melancholia it has engendered. Second, post-Soviet American studies reveals that the agents and agencies of the US state are also committed to unthinking the nation, so that the critique of nationalism within American studies offers relatively little insight into the workings of the contemporary US state. Alongside our own necessary reckoning with the legacies and afterlives of the modern nation-state form, we should remain attuned to the shifting relations of state to nation—and to the state’s own elaboration of a postnational body politic.

American Studies in the Post-Soviet Academy

The study of US literature and history in the former Soviet Union and its satellite states considerably antedates the watershed years of 1989–90, but teaching and research related to American studies behind the Iron Curtain was most often an area of specialization within history departments or departments of literature and philology. The formation of American studies centers, programs, and departments both within the established (Soviet-era) academies and within a proliferating array of private, American-style academies dates with only a few exceptions (for example, the American Studies Center at the University of Warsaw, founded in 1976) to the early and mid-1990s. While not ascending to parity with the established disciplines—national academies and other institutions of accreditation have been typically slow to acknowledge new imports such as American and gender studies—American studies has nevertheless flourished in the post-Soviet context, in the form of research centers, degree-granting programs and departments, usually (though not always) with support from private foundations (such as the Soros Foundation and the Eurasia Foundation) and the US Department of State (for example, through embassy information centers and USAID).1

Although disparate local and regional histories make a significant difference in the issues and methods of American studies in these venues—not to mention, for instance, the disparities between Eastern European countries now entering the European Union (EU) and the newly independent republics of Central Asia—it is nonetheless productive to consider American studies in the broader post-Soviet context that the title of my essay proposes. Indeed,
in a complaint (one of many) about what is known as the Bologna Process for standardizing higher education in the EU nations, Marek Kwiek explains the asymmetrical conditions of public higher education in Western Europe and in the “transition countries” of Central and Eastern Europe, in ways that illuminate the common conditions of the post-Soviet academy. “In a number of the transition countries escaping the model of command-driven economies,” Kwiek writes, “the ideological position regarding the role of the state in the public sector differs considerably from the position taken, with few national exceptions, on a European level: the ideal of the state about to emerge once the chaos of the transition period is over is the American model of cost-effectiveness and self-restraint, rather than the ‘European social model’ of the EU 15” (769). The conditions of higher education that Kwiek identifies as characteristic of the transition countries in Central and Eastern Europe is broadly germane to the former Soviet regions of Central Asia, as well, where we see a shift from centralized state planning to a specifically American model of the reduced state, with the attendant crisis of the public sector and the underfunding of public higher education that this shift entails.

Of course, the American model of the postwelfare, neoliberal state is perhaps less about the reduction than about the redistribution of governance functions, what Liam Kennedy and Scott Lucas, writing on the topic of public diplomacy, aptly describe as a reterritorialization of what were once, in the not too-distant past, narrowly state-centered activities. Their central claim is that public diplomacy is not defunct in the post-9/11 era (not simply preempted, we might say, by the spectacle of force, or the strategy of shock and awe), but rather that its current failures are a consequence of this reterritorialization of state power:

The failure of current attempts at U.S. public diplomacy can be attributed in part to their dependence on an old paradigm of ideological warfare. The conditions for the production and enactment of public diplomacy have changed significantly because of the way that global “interdependence” has radically altered the space of diplomacy. The founding premise of traditional diplomacy, that it was activity between states and their formal representatives, began to break down as the bipolar, state-centered context of the cold war gave way to multilevel relations conducted not only by national governments but by multinational corporations, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), private groups, and social movements using new technologies of communication to interact with and petition foreign publics. Moreover, this dispersal and reterritorialization of public diplomacy occurs amid the post-cold war (re)emergence of regional conflicts in international relations. American foreign policy is not only
rendered more global but more local by interventions in selected conflicts in which issues of “cultural difference” magnify the problems of communication encountered by American public diplomacy. The difficulty of conducting a “war of ideas” is compounded in a global information sphere that can swiftly expose and interrogate contradictions of declared values and apparent policies and actions. (Kennedy and Lucas, 322; my emphasis)

The authors’ enumeration of the changed conditions for public diplomacy usefully shorthands the context in which post-Soviet American studies emerged, the “multilevel relations” among governments, corporations, and NGOs that produce, among other things, the funding streams for the private, American-style universities that sprang up across the dismantled Soviet empire, seemingly overnight, in the 1990s, and for the burgeoning American studies programs throughout the region. In the prevailing analytic discourse of the policymakers—the government and corporate administrators who conceive and elaborate them—these “multilevel relations” are routinely figured as a partnership among discrete sectors—states, markets, and civil society—with civil society, in particular, framed as a “third way,” an alternative to market fundamentalisms that does not entail a return to state regulation of the marketplace or a resurrection of the state as a primary public service provider. Post-Soviet American studies is, in many respects, the brainchild of this partnership, but it is one that provides a telling perspective on the discourses and the institutional configurations of the reterritorialized state, and especially on the way these operate (outside or apart from the frame of national culture) to reproduce social subjects accommodated to present practices of governmental power. In the American studies that emerges from this public diplomatic matrix, I will argue, the pedagogy of citizenship is no longer lodged (or lodged primarily) in the discourse of an assimilative nationalism.

In any case, we might note that the arrival of American studies in the former Soviet bloc after 1990 coincides, roughly speaking, with the transnational turn in US-based American studies, alongside a new interest in the possibilities of a critical internationalism that would cede US ownership of the field. But where the inter- and transnationalism of American studies appear complementary in the United States, that alignment seems tenuous, at best, if we consider the post-Soviet academy as one arena of the field’s internationalization. In an essay describing the institutional and intellectual history of American studies in Hungary, for example, Éva Federmayer compares the discontinuous investments that organize research and teaching in the United States and in post-Soviet Hungary. Her portrayal of roughly consonant thematics, on the one hand, and widely incommensurate critical
aspirations, on the other hand, is notable for its explicit and thoughtful consideration of a chasm that I have never failed to encounter in conversations with Americanists from the former Soviet bloc, but that goes usually unacknowledged—even, indeed especially, when I have sought to raise the question. Federmayer writes:

The beginning of American Studies as an academic discipline at Hungarian colleges and universities is basically coterminous with the watershed years of 1989–1990 when the country made a radical shift from state socialism toward parliamentary democracy and a free economy. This political and economic about-face, which came hand-in-hand with the undermining of foundationalist certainties and the generation of new anxieties coincided, more or less, with the radical transformation that American Studies was undergoing between the 1990s and the early 2000s. Shaped by crucial scholarly debates in the U.S. American Studies community since the 1970s, “paradigm dramas” (as diagnosed by Gene Wise in 1979) fomented New American Studies with powerful agendas of pluralization and de-centering—a most challenging project that shows striking resonances with changes in Hungarian society and culture since 1990.

However, the apparently easy parallel . . . is misleading. Whereas dominant discourses of New American Studies demonstrate a markedly “leftist” commitment to effect social change by remapping the relationship between culture, power, and social identities, current discourses in the highly charged political arena in Hungary demonstrate a shift toward conservative and/or populist agendas. To be sure, a country’s political climate (nowadays saturated with nationalist concerns and economic anxieties, real or generated) should not be confused with the politics of another’s scholarly community. What I seek to point out is the surprising discontinuities that a Hungarian Americanist is inevitably confronted with today when situating herself vis-à-vis subversive “post-Americanist” narratives about the transnational turn and critical internationalism typically dominating U.S. scholarly dialogue today. (Federmayer)

Here Federmayer lays out how certain elements of American studies—specifically, its embrace of identity politics and critical multiculturalism—dovetail with the contexts and preoccupations of Hungarian Americanists, while other elements, such as the “posting” of national contexts in preference to transnational and internationalist analytic frameworks, do not. Federmayer alludes, if only parenthetically, to the political crises of postsocialist Hungary that have followed from an upsurge of racialized ethnic nationalisms, fomented as one kind of familiar response to the incursions of transnational capital in both their cultural and economic manifestations (for example, the saturation of Hungarian mass media and public space with global
popular culture, the impoverishment of the Soviet-era bourgeoisie, and the exponential increase in the gap between rich and poor). In this regard, no doubt, Hungarian politics are typical of conditions in many nations of the former Soviet bloc, as Federmayer’s use of the undifferentiated “a country” (any country) implies. From the vantage of us-based American studies, one might surmise that the “post-Americanist” turn offers a useful analytic tool for Hungarian (and other post-Soviet) Americanists, who stand themselves (by and large) well to the left of racial populisms. But it is identity politics that meets the critical mandate to counter protofascist social mobilizations with a progressive representational politics, realized both in state protections for minority rights and in academic institutional sanctions of the knowledge projects that array nationalities, religions, and sexualities disqualified from the full rights and benefits of citizen as subjects of their own histories.

In contrast, both the transnational turn and, for that matter, the particular version of internationalism that is called critical internationalism invite attention to questions of political economy—to the historical relationship, for example, between nationalism and expansionist capital as it informs processes of immigration, migration, and diaspora. They call attention, as well, to the political economy of the modern university as an institutional guardian of national culture, which is, from this revisionist perspective, bound up in the relays of national identity, gendered and racial citizenship, entrepreneurialism (and other forms of professional-managerial competency), and imperial world making. Meanwhile, the intellectual identities of humanities-based scholars in the former Soviet bloc are routinely forged in opposition to the economic determinisms that have largely stood in for political economy as such within Soviet-era secondary and postsecondary education. In the intellectual’s imaginary that attends the demise of the socialist state and the academy’s projected retrieval from bureaucratic state control, moreover, the university is seen as a platform for public social engagement, rather than (as it does in the United States) an ivory tower marginal to the arenas where social change is wrought. From this perspective, a war of position—securing legitimacy and intellectual autonomy within the academy—seems more urgent than, say, unraveling the place of the contemporary university within neoliberal political economy. As Federmayer observed in response to a discussion of neoliberalism instigated by the us-based participants at a Central European University conference, to Hungarian academics—Americanists, feminists, and others committed to post-Soviet knowledge projects—neoliberalism simply does not seem like much of a problem, certainly nothing on the scale of the burgeoning ethnonationalist political parties and the perennial insecurity of identitarian knowledge projects (including American studies) in the academy. Although she did not
dispute my suggestion that neoliberalism and ethnonationalism were linked phenomena, two sides of a coin, the linkage was evidently not compelling to her in the way it is to me, nor did it follow to her that critical analysis of the one could not and should not stand apart from critical analysis of the other.

To ask how American studies travels is not just to trace the uneven transmission of content across disparate institutional cultures and terrains but also, more fundamentally, to consider the subjects it arrays—the practices and fantasies (the two can never be separated) of political agency it sustains—which can never be simply inferred from interdisciplinary content. The contingent articulation of knowledge project to expert subject is especially marked in Enikő Bollabás’s program for an internationalized American studies, even as she seems to offer a normative account that would reconcile regional incongruities:

Therefore, in East-Central Europe the intellectual had to “do the sixties” in the 1990s, when finally there emerged a demand, say, for both feminist activism and feminist criticism, for gay and lesbian consciousness-raising as well as queer theory, for social activism in general as well as the desire for a finer understanding and critique. Together with all these new activities and ideas often packaged in the United States, there came an unprecedented influx of U.S. products. U.S. business and cultural presence has proved equally difficult to figure out; this is where American studies is beginning to have a social role: to help identify what is desirable and what is not desirable to import—whether politically, socially, culturally, or conceptually. In order to be able to do this, American studies must substantiate both the appreciation and the critique of U.S. culture; it must, in other words, balance the “respect mode” [of Cold War American studies] with the “attack mode” [of contemporary New Americanist work]. This balancing act is, I believe, the true meaning of the internationalization of American studies, so memorably and powerfully called for by Jane Desmond and Virginia Dominguez. (565; my emphasis)

The conceptual linchpin of this passage, it seems to me, is not the call to balance with which it concludes (as though one could simply split the difference between apology and critique), but rather the way it situates American studies in Eastern and Central Europe as an expert knowledge that can mediate between cultural nationalism and cosmopolitanism within the public sphere. Certainly, this way of imagining the “social role” of American studies and the cultural authority of the scholar has no analog in the US context (we can scarcely imagine American studies in the United States today operating on a national ethical imperative to distinguish desirable from undesirable cultural forms). But it is also not possible to position this set of investments as backward with respect to US American studies, or as less sophisticated—
or even, I would argue, to locate Central and Eastern European American studies to the right of its leftist US counterpart. After all, Bollobás’s version of Central and Eastern European American studies is also seeking to disseminate a (limited) critique of capital flows within a public sphere in which expressly reactionary discourses have tended to predominate. So unless we in the United States care to legislate that nationalist discourses (for example, about what is desirable or not for the nation) are always and everywhere toxic (in other words, unless we choose to impose our own postnationalism as a universal critical norm), then we must concede that left and right travel no better than transnational American studies. It does not require extensive contact with intellectuals from countries in the former Soviet bloc to recognize that Marxism, as the principle of Soviet-era bureaucratic state control and as the critique of capital, is at least as likely to signify right reaction as left opposition (and that, too, all forms of Marxist-derived political economy, including those we might tend to define as much by their distance from classical Marxism as by their indebtedness to it, code as part of a relatively undifferentiated Marxist analytic).

From this vantage point, the task of defining something like the ideological cast of American studies sponsored by the US state and US donors in the former Soviet bloc—as we aspired to do, not so long ago, in our critical retrospectives of the field as a Cold War export—is not only difficult, but also, as I take it, a blind alley. As Federmayer, Bollobás, and others attest, American studies in the former Soviet bloc has served as a point of entry for a range of critical practices, including feminism, multiculturalism, and poststructuralism, if only because fluency in English (as well as familiarity with researching US archives and publications) permits access to these critical orientations. So the originators and initial faculty members of American studies centers and departments after 1990, especially within the state academies, were often literary scholars and historians whose work on things American (within foreign literatures or modern history departments, for example) had brought them into contact with the critical conversations that were reshaping those disciplines in the 1980s United States. No doubt, for those of us trained entirely in the US academy, it is hard to imagine American studies as the way into, say, deconstruction or radical lesbian feminism. But the history of American studies’ emergence in the former Soviet bloc and the contemporary investments of Central and Eastern European and Central Asian Americanists both suggest that American studies functions as a conduit and staging ground for a heterogeneous array of critical projects—and that if the transnational turn is not well marked in these regional iterations of American studies, neither are they aligned with an unreconstructed or celebratory Americanism.
Despite the “surprising discontinuities” that confront the Hungarian Americanist, then, and that confront others in the region, American studies in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia feels approximately in time with US-based American studies. Perusing course offerings, for instance, I read titles that are not much different from what I would expect to find in core or cross-listed US American studies curricula. A few representative course titles include “Ethnicity, Nation, National Minority: A Comparative Approach” and “Black Modernism, or the New Negro Renaissance” (Eötvös Loránd University); “Interrogating Whiteness: From Identity to Imperialism” and “Gender and Sexuality” (American University of Central Asia; and “Delving into the Heart of the Matrix” and “Political Violence and Terrorism” (Baku State University). Titles are only gestural, to be sure, but they nevertheless index a traffic in organizing motifs and critical preoccupations. My point is that post-Soviet American studies is not simply the old exceptionalism dressed up in more current fashions (for example, referring to diversity in lieu of the melting pot)—at least not to any greater extent than we find contemporary idioms grafted onto abiding exceptionalist frameworks within the American studies curricula of US academic institutions. Rather, post-Soviet American studies curricula appear to sample the issues and methods of their US equivalents and thus to reproduce something of the scattered quality of US American studies, as it ranges across liberal and critical multiculturalisms and their different orientations to such key topoi as identity, freedom, justice, nation, and markets.

The State as Educator

What are the aspirations of the US state and its funding partners for American studies abroad, if it is not (or no longer) bound to the dissemination of an exceptional—at once inimitable and assimilative—Americanism? If indeed the issues and methods of American studies abroad are variably oriented to a range of analytic and political priorities? Ideology is always a restless traveler, to be sure, inasmuch as the same content produces disparate effects in different times and locations. But my point is that the shape of American studies in the region does not resolve into a content from which we might derive its sponsors’ agenda for the post-Soviet knowledge consumer (however unevenly that agenda might be realized on the ground). If delivery of an ideological content is not the agenda, then what are the aspirations, to cite Antonio Gramsci’s still resonant formulation, of the state as educator? The role of the state as educator is plain enough in the historical context of the modern nation-state, where the institutions and offices of the state govern in the name of a national people and in conformity to the law that
embodies the people’s sovereign will. Where the legitimacy of the state is based on the premise of popular sovereignty, the state as educator cultivates a particular kind of modern subject: a “free” subject whose emancipation (as citizen or as individual) requires his voluntary accession to the distribution of power and privilege that the law secures. The “individual is interpellated as a (free) subject,” Louis Althusser tells us, “in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection” (136). Or, in Michael Warner’s memorable formulation, the citizen who is both sovereign and subject must enact “consent to his own coercion” (111). Emancipation entails domination cathexed as choice—and it is precisely the business of the state to sustain that cathexis through the mediation of a normative nationalism that sutures atomized (self-owning) individuals to the abstract body of the American people.

But does the legitimacy of state power depend any longer on the exercise of popular sovereignty—on the claim to represent a national people? Or, to put the question in a slightly different way, does the viability of the state depend any longer on the appearance of legitimacy? What if freedom is no longer the name of the game, despite the ways in which the idioms of freedom continue to circulate residually, as the fragments of what Medovoi calls “a ruined ideology” (171)? In the remaining sections of this essay, I suggest how post-Soviet American studies, as a joint project of the US state and the nongovernmental actors of civil society, sets us on the trail of precisely such a transformation, in which the state no longer frees the individual but operationalizes her: assesses and selectively cultivates her capacities. At the site of the emergence of new postnational relays between the state and civil society, relays that are keyed in turn to the contemporary organizations of global capital and flexible accumulation, we encounter a different model of citizen—let’s call her the neocitizen—who is interpellated as functional, rather than as free, where functionality entails ease of interface with administrative networks on different scales (local, regional, and global); an analytic orientation to social relations as data and a facility in the evaluation of data based on such measures as risk, compliance, outcomes, and capacity; a cosmopolitan orientation to diversity; and (preferably) fluency in the lingua franca of global governance, English. Unlike freedom, functionality is not a putatively generalized condition but indexes a differentially distributed condition of social and political agency. And unlike the free citizen, the neocitizen is interpellated into a set of administrative protocols that are framed as the instrument for the pursuit of broadly heterogeneous political aspirations. In fact, the real heterogeneity of the neocitizens’ identifications and convictions are entirely functional for this structure of governance, since they index exactly the social dispositions and formations to be accounted, risk-assessed, and managed by the institutions of the extended state. Neo-
citizenship is thus enacted not in the form of sovereign consent, but in the acquisition of a professionalized civic competence that entails belief only in the instrumental value of the organizations, institutions, and media to which this competency opens access. The relationship of the neocitizen to the structure of governance in which she participates is expressly and openly opportunistic, in other words, rather than consensual—and by extension there is no option for the performative withdrawal of consent, only for the tactical rejection of functionality as means. If the withdrawal of consent represents the ultimate realization of the sovereign citizen’s prerogatives, to reject functionality is simply to resign one’s neocitizenship.

So it follows that the pedagogies of neocitizenship would differ in kind from the pedagogies of the modern citizen-subject. Writing in a theoretical rather than a historical frame, Althusser famously suggests that ideology subjects us under the sign of freedom. The voice that hails me affirms the reality of my existence, but it also demands that I inhabit this reality—the one in which I find myself already represented, and which therefore appears to be naturally and rightfully my own. Although Althusser presents ideology (on the model of the unconscious) as eternal, I suggest that this concept of ideology is forged instead in the specific historical contexts of popular sovereignty, disciplinary society, and the modern nation-state. Increasingly, it strikes me that the present moment, marked by more or less radical transformations in each of these historical formations, demands at the very least that we reopen the question of how ideology works on the subject—as well as the question of how its subjects work. Yet it is no easy matter to think outside of or apart from this understanding of ideology as freeing—subjection cathected as self-realization—when it is precisely on this model that our critical practices have been developed.

In reflections on “the end of liberal democracy” Wendy Brown takes up the question of ideology today in terms of its vexed and uncertain relation to neoliberalism (37). Insisting on the increasing vacuity of the liberal democratic tropes that circulate, oddly enough, in tandem with the elaboration of a specifically “neoliberal rationality,” Brown suggests that neoliberalism sustains a parasitical relationship to the ideological discourses that its rationality supplants. “The post-9/11 period,” she notes, “has brought the ramifications of neoliberal rationality into sharp focus, largely through practices and policies that progressives assail as hypocrisies, lies, or contradictions but that may be better understood as neoliberal policies and actions taking shape under the legitimating cloth of a liberal democratic discourse increasingly void of substance” (47; my emphasis). So it appears that “neoliberalism can become dominant as governmentality without being dominant as ideology” (49). Brown’s provocative formulation helps explain
the limited efficacy of the “ruthless denaturalization” Medovoi recommends (175), insofar as neoliberalism has already denatured (or voided of substance) the ideological idioms it appropriates. And by imagining a power that prevails politically and organizationally but not ideologically, Brown also marks the limits of interpellation in Althusser’s terms and the inauguration of quite a different subject of power. In what sense can we speak of a neoliberal subject if neoliberalism is not mediated (or mediated primarily) through its proper ideological figures? How do we apprehend at the level of the subject a practice of power that does not act to reproduce the apparent substance—the “free” assent—of the individual?

In the present iterations of post-Soviet American studies, I find the outlines of a neocitizen who is operationalized or mobilized, but not emancipated and so not required to believe in the institutions, discourses, and practices that subject her. Brown suggests that neoliberalism seeks “legitimation” through the citation of liberal democratic discourse, but at the same time the vacuous nature of these citations transforms the ideological hail into so much ideological noise. From this perspective, the cynical response of the contemporary US electorate on which Brown also remarks indexes not so much the failure of these neoliberal legitimation strategies as the increasing irrelevance of conviction and consent. “Interpellation” (if we choose to retain the term at all) is no longer about cultivating attachment to what is right and natural, but simply about inserting the subject into the relays of power that she or he may choose to revere or revile. To do the work of the extended state, the neocitizen need only be networked, poised to navigate and proliferate the relationships that link foundations (state and corporate donors), civil society (organizations and associations), regulatory agencies (state-based and international ones), and the public sphere (corporate and alternative media).

Consider, for instance, the “civil society” mandate of the Eurasia Foundation, a privately managed nonprofit organization supported by USAID, which is also a major donor to the American University of Central Asia and its American Studies Department:

**Goal:** *Increased citizen participation in political and economic decision-making.*

Central to the Eurasia Foundation’s mission is the belief that local communities are best able to determine their own needs and priorities. The Foundation promotes the development of effective mechanisms for citizen participation in political and economic decision-making by engaging and strengthening civil society. In particular, the Foundation has encouraged independent media to act as a voice for their communities and community-based civic organizations to advocate for public policies that further democratic and market reforms.
The Foundation’s civil society program has emphasized projects that advance the financial sustainability and create a more nurturing legal and regulatory environment for the civil society sector as a whole (Eurasia Foundation).

One of a trio of mandates (the other two are “private enterprise development” and “public administration and policy”), the “civil society” mandate cites elements or keywords of a familiar discourse of participatory democracy, while reimagining the relations between state and civil society in which the norms and practices of civic “participation” are historically anchored. Here we find ourselves squarely on the terrain of “multilevel relations” among governments, corporations, and NGOs that Kennedy and Lucas describe. Thus a USAID-funded, privately managed nonprofit cultivates civic organizations and independent media that advocate for reforms (political and market freedoms), especially those that enhance the prospects for development and expansion of the “civil society sector.” By a curiously circular logic, then, the political activities of organizations in civil society address the state primarily, if not exclusively, for the purpose of securing its own continuing viability (“creating a more nurturing legal and regulatory environment”). Indeed, in this networked arena of “multilevel” governance, one is hard put to decide what the citizen participates in, since the primary aspiration of the “civil society sector” appears to be to establish and secure its own position as a nodal point (or “level”) through which governmental power flows. So, too, the citizen-participants are characterized not by a set of normative political commitments, but by their administrative capacity: “Like their counterparts in the private sector, leaders of civic and media organizations need to develop new skills to operate their organizations effectively. The Eurasia Foundation has supported the development of training programs that provide civil society leaders with the financial management skills they need to operate financially viable and effective institutions” (Eurasia Foundation).

The task of civic leadership, then, is to secure and manage revenue streams, especially by developing “local models of philanthropy and volunteerism” (Eurasia Foundation). For this reason, the Eurasia Foundation sets a “high priority on projects aimed at mobilizing community resources, both financial and human, around community development issues” (Eurasia Foundation). If the language of community-funded community activism evokes the romance of grass-roots politics, however, what drops from view in this iteration of “citizen participation” is a critical orientation to the state. Instead, we find citizens’ group “advocating for public policies” in some unspecified domain where public policy is forged (in corporate boardrooms, at international aid agencies, in government at the every level, and in the proliferating private organizations to which governmental functions
are outsourced). On the terrain of “multilevel” governance, moreover, the neocitizen is no longer sovereign: her posture is one of “advocacy” vis-à-vis a range of organizations that are under no a priori obligation to recognize her (as their practice of power does not depend on the claim to represent). Within the discursive world of the Eurasia Foundation’s mandates, community politics is about creating sustainable organizations of citizen-advocates, situated in the networks through which flow funds, personnel, and the social data that are the stuff of policy debate.

To a certain extent, it would appear that the Soros Foundation’s Open Society Institute (OSI)—which also supports a range of educational and civil-society-oriented initiatives in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, including the American University of Central Asia—holds instead to the modern conception of citizenship as the relation of sovereign subjects to the state. “The Open Society Foundations work to build vibrant and tolerant societies whose governments are accountable and open to the participation of all people,” we are told, although in what follows, as in George Soros’s own writing, “accountability” has less to do with the lawful exercise of state power than with good accounting practices (Open Society Foundations). An accountable government, according to these terms, is one that functions efficiently and cooperatively within the networked terrain of multilevel governance. Such efficiency and cooperation includes complying with laws and treaties and upholding basic citizenship rights (OSI is especially concerned with rights of minority populations). Yet despite the reappearance of these familiar touchstones of liberal democracy, the emphasis at OSI is not on cultivating the practice of popular sovereignty within formerly socialist state bureaucracies, but rather on cultivating civil society as the provider of professionalized advocacy within the wider field of networked governance. To this end, corrupt, autocratic governments must be either pressured or motivated to participate “accountably” in the network of international agencies, NGOs, and foundations through which governmental power operates. Implicit in the OSI mission statement, this understanding of governance and of civil society becomes explicit in Soros’s own writings on globalization, “open society,” and “social entrepreneurship” (Soros, 69).

Taken as a whole, Soros’s prolific writing on these topics might be characterized as a critique of capital from the standpoint of capital. His overarching concern is with strategies for redressing and mitigating the scope and scale of economic and social inequities that destabilize regimes, provoke opposition, and imperil social and economic infrastructures—in other words, his concern is with inequity conceptualized as systemic risk. In this regard, he shares much with Joseph Stiglitz, the former World Bank chief economist who has called for reforming and restructuring the institutions of global
governance and development assistance in an attempt to reduce immiseration and the threat of mass insurgencies it brings (Stiglitz 21–22; see also 119). Soros’s assessment of root causes, however, differs from Stiglitz’s in several ways, including an insistence on “bad government” as the central factor in the production of poverty. “Making the promotion of open society the goal differs from the internationally endorsed goal of poverty reduction in emphasizing the importance of the political arrangements prevailing in individual countries,” Soros writes, “but the fact is that poverty and misery are usually associated with bad governments” (59). This analysis underlies his two-part agenda: providing “public goods on a global scale” and “fostering economic, social, and political progress in individual countries” (58). Responsibility for the former is assigned to wealthy nations, acting through international agencies and NGOs. “There is an urgent need for the provision of public goods,” Soros observes, “and the rich countries ought to pay for them. Wealth redistribution used to take place on a national scale until globalization rendered progressive taxation counterproductive; now it ought to be practiced on a global scale” (106). “Public goods” in this view include resources for health, education, and environmental protection, as well as some provision for a “social safety net” (64). “Governments” (of the nonwealthy nations) serve as possible although not necessary relays in the delivery of public goods; thus, in cases of persistent corruption, Soros proposes that aid should flow directly to NGOs. Because “governments are not the most efficient economic agents” under the best of circumstances, he contends, “there is something wrong with international assistance if it serves to increase the role that governments play in the economy” (68–69). The transfer of responsibility for the provision of public goods away from “governments” reduces the role of the receiver states, in any case, to providing a kind of legal and administrative infrastructure.

Ultimately, then, we return to the conceptual framework of the Eurasia Foundation’s mandates. The “promotion of better governments,” Soros sums up, “includes not only an efficient and honest central and local administration and an independent and reliable judiciary but also the rule of law and an appropriate relation between the public and private spheres: a society that is not dominated by the state, a private sector that is not in cahoots with government, and a civil society whose voice is heard” (58). But heard where and by whom, exactly? In this network of governments (rich and poor), international agencies, foundations, and NGOs, there is no longer a privileged constitutive relationship between the state and its citizens. Good government is a service provider that secures, among other things, the conditions for civil society; the quantity and quality of “public goods” are reckoned on a cost-benefit analysis (their costs and benefits to state and
private-sector providers); and responsibility for their delivery is dispersed. Included among these “public goods” are the educational institutions that secure the production of the professionalized neocitizen.

“Neoliberal Zombies” and the New Imperialism?

I have been arguing that the foundations of and partnerships between state and private donors sponsoring American studies departments and centers in the new American universities, as well as in the refurbished state academies of countries in the former Soviet bloc and newly independent Soviet republics, have prioritized the social production of the professionalized neocitizen, and that the pedagogies of neocitizenship are relatively content-neutral. American studies in this iteration is hospitable to any number of knowledge projects, which are left to the discretion, so to speak, of local faculty members, academic administrators, and students in particular national and regional contexts. Indeed, American studies in the former Soviet bloc, like the wider regional apparatus of higher education as a “public good” sponsored by a “rich” country (in Soros’s terms), could hardly be more sensitive or more receptive to local initiative and variations. The language of the donor foundation mandates is not the exceptionalist discourse of the city on a hill. It does not promote American values even if, from time to time, donors or the academies themselves opportunistically recycle some of that language. They can do so precisely because there is no proper neoliberal ideology that might be vitiated by such borrowings, as Brown suggests. Rather, American studies in the former Soviet bloc is bound up in an apparatus of higher education that cultivates a specific form of civic participation as professionalized advocacy. From the perspective of the interests that operate this apparatus, it matters relatively little what one wishes to advocate for, as long as the advocacy takes place within the relays of multilevel governance that Kennedy and Lucas describe. Students in the region pursuing American studies training or degrees are not asked to produce an identification with America, nor in general do they do so. What the programs offer is a capacity for neocitizenship that functions (or promises to function) tactically in the service of any number of political, social, or entrepreneurial agendas. Thus American studies at the American University of Central Asia specifically cites the placement record of its graduates, who “work at organizations like the U.S. Embassy in the Kyrgyz Republic, UNICEF, Counterpart International, and in other NGOs or private firms in their respective countries” (American University of Central Asia), while the Department of American Studies at Eötvös Loránd University asserts in similarly sweeping terms that “graduates have entered into academia, the civil and diplo-
matics service, as well as the political and economic spheres” (Eötvös Loránd University).

If American studies and American academies in the former Soviet bloc represent the contemporary neoliberal culture of US imperialism, it is not a cultural politics we can think by analogy to the old, however much the present forms of world making feel like the changing same. In many ways, I would agree with Madina Tlostanova’s scathing account of Westernized higher education in the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union that situates it in the context of an all too familiar imperial history. “These locales can be attractive only as symbolic signs of geo-strategic dominance (which does not require any capital investment) or a place for the erection of new military bases for the future ‘righteous’ wars for oil,” she writes, “while the local population either is added to the dispensable lives or is indoctrinated by neo-liberal ideologies by means of opening the American universities, distributing of grants, and if need be, organizing the fruit and flower revolutions to replace the ex-Soviet bosses with the neo-liberal zombies” (3). But the ruptures are no less decisive than the continuities. If modern empire and colonization entailed cultural imposition (the civilizing mission) without political incorporation (citizenship rights did not extend to the colonized), the neoliberal variant, it seems to me, entails very nearly the reverse: effective incorporation in networks of transnational, multilevel governance, where the watchwords are efficiency, output, excellence, accountability, compliance, flexibility, capacity—in short, an arsenal of administrative benchmarks that set the conditions of participation but do nothing to compel belief. Neoliberal culture, such as it is, does not operate normatively to produce identifications, but rather takes account and operationalizes identifications (national, regional, ethnic, gendered, sexual, and so forth) that are produced in other arenas and idioms of social and political life. Reading somewhat against Tlostanova’s grain, I take the zombie as a possible figuration of the neocitizen, since the zombie, after all, is an animated corpse that acts with relentless purpose and an utter lack of faith or conviction. What other forms—more or less hopeful—the neocitizen may yet assume remains, of course, to be seen.

Notes

1. In the absence of external foundation support, these programs are vulnerable to cost-cutting measures and the kind of curricular streamlining that tends to accompany the implementation of the Bologna process (Éva Federmayer, personal communication).

2. For this “third way” discourse on civil society, see, for example, Edwards, Civil Society; Salamon et al., Global Civil Society.
3. For this understanding of the history of the field in the former Soviet bloc regions, I am crucially indebted to Olga Bogacheva and Sabina Manfova (personal communications).

4. My information on the American studies curriculum at Eötvös Loránd University is taken from the department’s graduate program handbook, edited by Tibor Frank. For details of course offerings of the American Studies Center at Baku State, I thank Sabina Manfova for forwarding the center’s newsletter (personal communication, June 9, 2004). The course titles in American studies at the American University of Central Asia were posted online (American University of Central Asia).

5. Gramsci develops this concept in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (257–64).

6. The continuation of the quoted statement emphasizes this latter point: “To achieve its mission, OSI seeks to shape public policies that assure greater fairness in political, legal, and economic systems and safeguard fundamental rights. On a local level, OSI implements a range of initiatives to advance justice, education, public health, and independent media. At the same time, OSI builds alliances across borders and continents on issues such as corruption and freedom of information. OSI places a high priority on protecting and improving the lives of people in marginalized communities” (Soros Foundation).

**Works Cited**


