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*Review of State Work: Public Administration and Mass  
Intellectuality*, by Stefano Harney

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*State Work: Public Administration and Mass Intellectuality.* By Stefano Harney. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002. Pp. x+226. \$54.95 (cloth); \$18.95 (paper).

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I once complained to a friend about my obsession with studying state bureaucracy. My friend tried to reassure me saying: "The bureaucrats are sexy!" I never knew what he meant until I read Stefano Harney's *State Work*, a unique and remarkably literate meditation of public administration from a cultural studies perspective. Harney does well what a number of scholars have called for but have never done themselves: he provides a cultural critique of public administration as a field and as a practice. While there are times where meaning is strained, this well-written and thoughtful book challenges the very foundations of public administration and poses profound issues for state theory. This is a stunning achievement, and Harney is to be commended for going where others feared to tread. In particular, he is to be praised for finding new paths for pursuing the state as an object of theory and as a site for political struggle.

What does it mean to say that Harney provides a cultural studies critique of public administration theory and practice? It means more than Harney's entertaining and productive invocation of popular culture in the form of television shows like *The X-Files* and *Law and Order* and Hollywood cinema like *The Matrix* in order to suggest how bureaucrats are positioned in popular discourse and reflected in the mass imaginary.

Harney suggests that public administration inevitably recreates the state as an object of concern at least as much as the state enlists public administration to rationalize its existence. Harney forces us to think that if the state did not exist, bureaucrats would have to create it in order to rationalize their work, legitimate their goals, and underwrite their authority. In the process, we are left to ponder who needs whom more and for what end. Using labor process theory and Italian workerist critiques, the "state effect" is the self-fulfilling result of bureaucratic labor's need for its own legitimation. Carefully using personal experience for a case study of antiracism work in the bureaucracy at the provincial level in Canada as well as examples from municipal administration in the police department in New York City, Harney illustrates how bureaucrats are constantly at risk of having to perform, to confront the "terror of public life," and to allow themselves to be enlisted in efforts to reproduce the state as a sign of power and source of domination, even when they are seeking to promote positive social change in the form of multiculturalism or in the name of diversity. Bureaucrats are constantly at risk of recreating the very sources of power that their social change efforts are ostensibly designed to dismantle. The implications for state theory and democratic

politics are nothing less than profound, and open up important strategic issues regarding the bureaucracy as a critical site for resisting domination.

But I mean more when I say Harney provides a cultural critique of public administration. As important as his ruminations are concerning the state effect of bureaucratic labor, equally useful here is Harney's sustained critique of the contemporary currents of public administration theory as tethered to the crisis of confidence afloat in late capitalist society. Especially challenging is Harney's compelling analysis of how even the most progressive forms of contemporary thought in public administration are mortgaged to totalizing images of the capitalist state. The depoliticization of public administration thought and its requisite inability to engender the very challenges to the domination it allegedly champions are repeatedly enumerated in telling ways in this book.

The incredibly popular "reinventing government" movement and its ties to the broader public management school are an excellent case in point. Harney devastatingly analyzes this popular intellectual current in public administration as a cutting-edge school of thought that does not so much introduce successful management strategies of the private sector into public bureaucracies as much as it tacitly participates in the redefinition of the state so as to make it retrenchable for the private purposes of facilitating economic change in the inequitable globalizing economy. The state effect of bureaucratic labor is at work again, this time rationalizing the power to retrench the welfare state as inefficient and passé and doing so by stealth, embedded as it is in the unexamined biases of public management theory.

Harney further shows quite convincingly that the social democratic critics of public management theory fail themselves to interrogate the state effects of their own thinking and that this failure limits their ability to imagine alternative performance criteria for good public management. In the end, Harney finds public administration's obsession with performance standards an important site for rethinking the power embedded in bureaucratic labor and how it can be turned to promoting cooperative networks for facilitating positive social change. Ultimately, this involves rethinking bureaucrats as citizens who can be aligned with other citizens in remaking the public sphere and imagining what is possible within it. You would think we could at least begin to do that. This is the challenge that Harney leaves for us. By the book's end, Harney has taken us far from the pedestrian concerns of running a public agency and has shown us that in terms of a politics of social change, the bureaucrats are sexy, very sexy indeed. For that reason alone, this is a provocative book that is bound to stir up some change of its own.